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### REVIEWS

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SVS SB-3000 sub  
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Harman Kardon  
soundbar  
Sonos Amp

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■ THE LITTLE MERMAID  
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→ COLLECTING... ROAD TRIP MOVIES → CABASSE EOLE 4 5.1 → COMPETITIONS

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NEXT ISSUE ON SALE: May 16, 2019



# Welcome

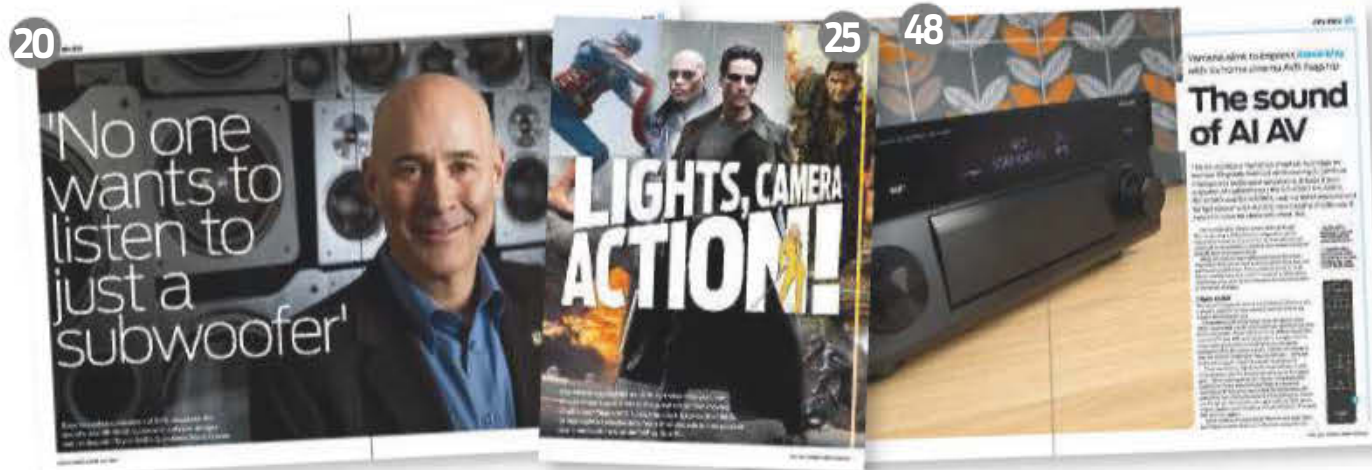
When we choose our Disc of the Month it's typically an easy pick, yet this issue a trio of platters arrived that caused us to pause.



*Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* is not only worthy of the highest praise for its groundbreaking animation techniques, it looks and sounds simply phenomenal on 4K BD. Then there's the *Aquaman* platter, which combines aspect ratio switching and an LFE-laden Dolby Atmos soundmix with perhaps **the best advert for home cinema's wide colour and HDR technologies I've yet seen.**

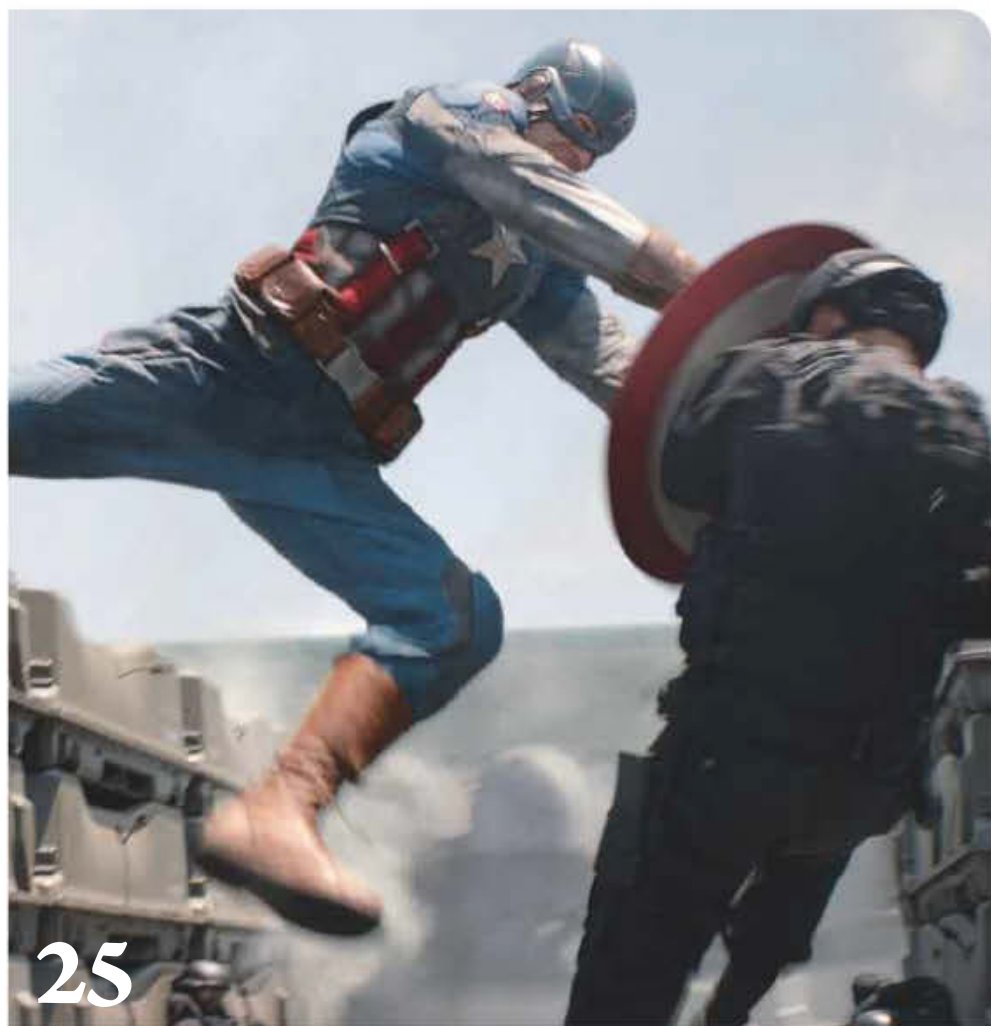
But what's this making a late challenge? Lionsgate's 4K BD of *Robin Hood* [2018], which adopts a consumer friendly HDR10+ and Dolby Vision approach, chucks in a fantastic Atmos mix, and – thanks to its 8K digital cinematography – looks as sharp as one of Robin's arrow tips. If the film had made any sense it would probably have been crowned our winner...

*Mark Craven*  
Editor





# MENU



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**John Archer:**  
The experienced TV tester cut his teeth as an early HCC staffer



**Jon Thompson:**  
Film producer and post-production expert delves into Hollywood and AV



**Steve May:**  
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**Richard Stevenson:**  
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**Ed Selley:**  
Audiophile Ed mixes his home cinema passion with a love of vinyl



**Steve Withers:**  
Movie fan, display calibrator and object-based audio obsessive

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We hit the road in search of 10 more discs that deserve a spot in your collection



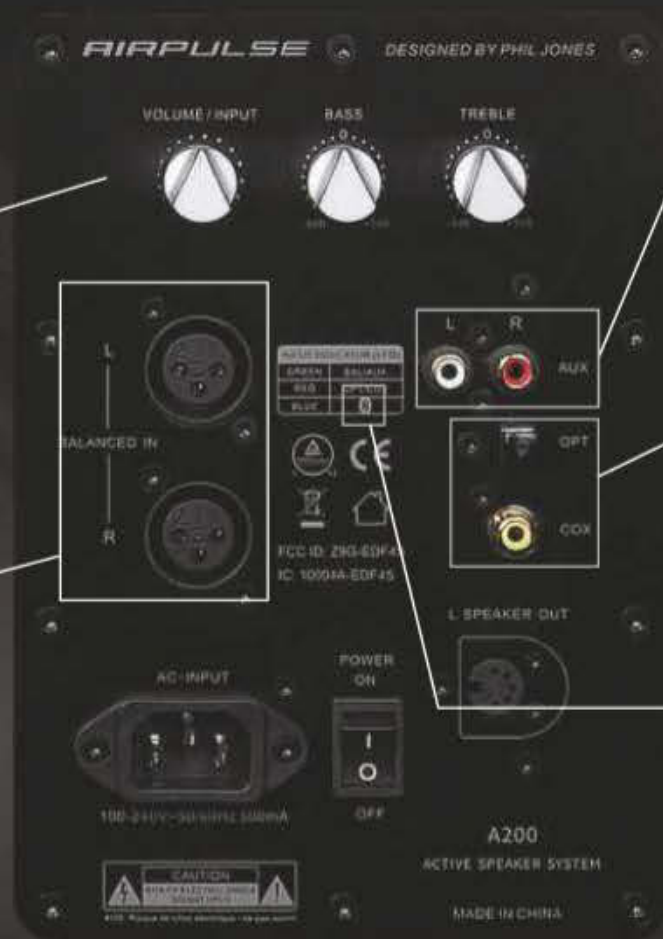
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# BULLETIN

→ **NEWS HIGHLIGHTS** APPLE Tech giant prepares TV+ streaming video service  
 BENQ 4K HDR projector duo announced CABASSE 'Europe's best-selling speaker pack' updated  
 AT THE PLEX This month's cinema releases NEWS X10 The hottest news stories in  
 bite-sized chunks BUMBLEBEE Transformers prequel rolls out on 4K Blu-ray & MORE!

## Sound and vision combined

Optoma UHZ65UST → [www.optoma.co.uk](http://www.optoma.co.uk)



Optoma is lining up a Summer launch for a new ultra-short-throw (UST) 4K Laser projector, named the UHZ65UST. Claiming to deliver a 100in 4K HDR image from a throw distance of less than 50cm, this stylish PJ will also support Full HD 3D playback, and feature Optoma's Pure Motion frame interpolation tech and voice control smarts. Unusually, the UHZ65UST also features a built-in soundbar, developed by Optoma's sister brand NuForce, with separate bass/HF drivers. Pricing remains TBC.


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[facebook.com/homecinemachoice](https://facebook.com/homecinemachoice)



# Going Solo

Screen Innovations Solo 2 → [www.screeninnovations.com](http://www.screeninnovations.com)

A large, slim-profile electric projector screen is mounted in a modern living room. The screen displays a vibrant image of a turquoise sea under a bright blue sky with fluffy white clouds. To the left of the screen, a white leather sofa is partially visible. To the right, a white telescope on a tripod stands near the screen. The room has light-colored wooden flooring and a white ceiling with recessed lighting. Large windows in the background offer a view of a green lawn and trees.

Looking for an electric projector screen but want to avoid the fuss of running cables? In addition to low voltage and mains-powered designs, Screen Innovations' Solo 2 range offers a Lithium battery model with a magnetic charge plate – the company claims it will typically last for two years before a recharge is required via the supplied magnetic cable. Screen sizes for this option reach 120in (16:9), and the wall- or ceiling-mounted casing can be specified in a range of 12 colours.



## Audio on the go from Denon



Denon has announced a trio of headphones in a new GC range. The top AH-GC30 model (£300, pictured) features both active noise cancelling and wireless aptX HD Bluetooth transmission; the AH-GC25NC (£265) is a wired-only design with noise cancelling; and the AH-GC25W (£215) drops noise cancelling but reintroduces a Bluetooth connection and claims a 40-hour battery life. All three models feature 'ergonomic memory foam' ear-pads and synthetic leather finishes. [www.denon.co.uk](http://www.denon.co.uk)

## iBox expands smart range



UK accessories brand iBox has unveiled a line of battery-powered cradles for Amazon Alexa devices and Google's Home Mini speaker – the idea being you can transform your mains-powered smart device into something portable. Pricing is £40 for the Move (Google Home Mini), Run (Amazon Echo Dot 3rd Gen) and Surge (Amazon Echo 2nd Gen). iBox's Vault (Echo Spot) and Release (Echo Dot) are £60, but add additional 12W speakers (and passive bass radiators) to boost sonics. [www.iboxstyle.com](http://www.iboxstyle.com)

# Apple bitten by VOD bug

New TV+ subscription service to challenge Netflix with original content

Apple has announced its long-rumoured Apple TV+ streaming service will launch later this year, promising a slate of content produced in collaboration with TV/film heavyweights including Steven Spielberg, JJ Abrams, M Night Shyamalan and more.

Confirmation came during the tech giant's keynote event in March. Apple is describing its TV+ platform as 'the new home for the world's most creative storytellers.'

Pricing details remain unannounced, with Apple suggesting they'll be unveiled when TV+ arrives in the Autumn, but it did confirm the service will be ad-free.

Similarly, Apple is tight-lipped on any technical information regarding HDR, resolution or sound formats. But it's hard to see the corporation not following the VOD herd in offering 4K HDR streams with object-based audio – particularly as its iTunes Movies service embraces HDR10, Dolby Vision and Dolby Atmos.

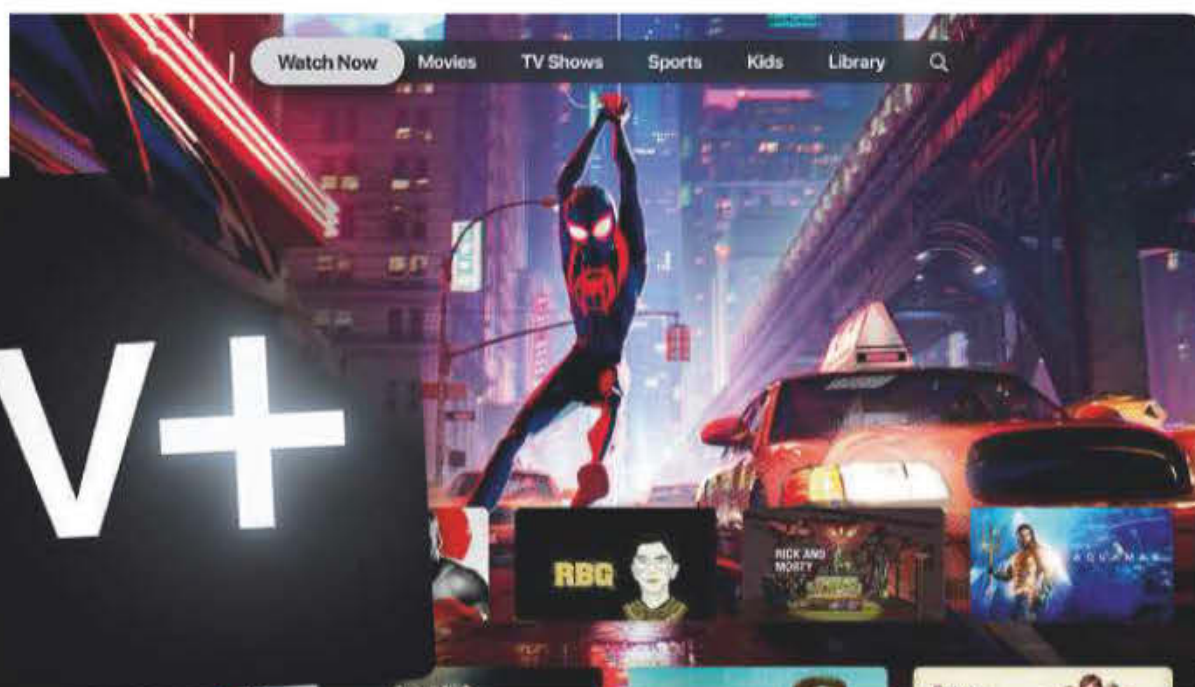
Apple's TV+ platform will be incorporated in its Apple TV app

Access to Apple TV+ will come via the new Apple TV app that is scheduled to debut in May. This will incorporate film and TV content from iTunes, plus cherry-picked 'channel' subscriptions – third parties confirmed for the US include HBO, Showtime and Starz.

The Apple TV app is due to grace the smart hubs of Samsung, Sony and LG TVs, plus Amazon Fire and Roku devices. Naturally, it will also be available on iPhone, iPad, Apple TV and Mac hardware.

Said Eddy Cue, Apple's senior vice president of Internet Software and Services, at the March launch that streamed live: 'We're thrilled to give viewers a sneak peek of Apple TV+ and cannot wait for them to tune in starting this Autumn. Apple TV+ will be home to some of the highest-quality original storytelling that TV and movie lovers have seen yet.'

Apple TV+ will have to fight the established giants of Netflix and Amazon in the streaming arena, and will also face competition from the soon-to-be-launched Disney+ platform.



## Playlist...

Team HCC spins up its disc picks of the month

### The Girl in the Spider's Web (UHD Blu-ray)

Fede Alvarez's pacy thriller not only delivers superior UHD imagery, but it's also the rare instance of a film getting a 4K release in the UK and not the US.



### Evil Dead II (Ultra HD Blu-ray)



Surprisingly good 4K visuals make this disc an essential upgrade for fans of the classic horror-comedy.

### Sister Street Fighter Collection (Region B Blu-ray)



Four of the wildest pieces of 1970s Japanese action cinema you'll ever see in one handy Blu-ray release.

### Captain America: The Winter Soldier (All-region Blu-ray)



We've been revisiting Steve Rogers at his very best to prepare for the upcoming *Avengers: Endgame*.

### Creed II (Ultra HD Blu-ray)



This 4K disc lands a knockout blow with its crisp visuals and HDR10/Dolby Vision grading.



**At the 'plex...**

Heading out to see a flick?  
Catch these this month

**Greta**

**April 19:** No good deed goes unpunished in Neil Jordan's new psychological thriller about a waitress (Chloë Grace Moretz) who finds herself in a world of trouble after returning a lost handbag to a lonely widow (Isabelle Huppert).

**Avengers: Endgame**

**April 25:** The shroud of secrecy shall soon be removed and we'll finally learn which of our favourite Marvel superheroes live or die as the long-awaited follow-up to *Avengers: Infinity War* arrives in UK cinemas. Movies don't come much bigger than this.

**Detective Pikachu**

**May 10:** The *Pokémon* bandwagon rumbles on with this live-action movie featuring Ryan 'Deadpool' Reynolds as the voice of the furry yellow critter. Surprisingly, based on the trailers, it looks pretty funny.

# Unlocking cinema colour

BenQ's new 4K DLP projectors aim to satiate UHD Blu-ray fans

BenQ has announced two 4K DLP projectors with DCI-P3 colour talents. Arriving in April, the CinePrime W2700 and W5700 are the first to utilise a next-gen Texas Instruments DMD chipset able to unlock the wider colour gamut featured on 4K UHD Blu-rays, a step up from REC.709 hues.

At the launch of the new models, the company played out an endorsement from cinematographer Jake Pollock, best known for his work on martial arts movies. 'I'm not looking for a projector to give me something better than I've done. I'm looking for a projector to give me exactly what I've done.'

The new PJs use a conventional UHP lamp source, but run proprietary software to maximise colour accuracy. They share the same RGBRGB colour wheel, albeit with minor coating differences to better match each lamp and lens.

However, there is a price to be paid for this extended colour gamut. The two models are rated at 2,000 and 1,800 Lumens brightness respectively, but to see those richer colours, users need to engage the Dark Cinema image preset, which effectively reduces the light output of each projector by more than 50 per cent. BenQ quotes 700 Lumens for the W5700 in this Dark Cinema mode.

HCC had an early look at the two models, and can confirm their excellent colour saturation. But the loss of brightness does mean that a full dark cinema install is probably the way to go if you want to see discs with an extended colour space.

Another benefit of the new DLP chipset is an improved black level performance, with enhanced contrast. BenQ quotes a dynamic contrast of 30,000:1 for the W2700, and 100,000:1 for the W5700.



**Michael Chen:** 'In the second-half of the year, you will see ultra-short-throw laser projection from us'

Both models come with HDR-PRO, a projector-optimised tone mapping technology for HDR10 and HLG content. Image smoothing MEMC interpolation is on hand for sports coverage, while Pixel Enhancement offers a level of sharpness control.

The W2700, a replacement for the W1070, will be priced around £1,500. It's a compact design with a white living-room friendly finish, 1.3x zoom and vertical lens shift, fronted by an all-glass 4K optimised lens array. The larger W5700 is a long-throw model, with 1.6x zoom and both horizontal and vertical manual image shift. 'If you want a 200in screen, you could fit the projector between six-to-nine metres,' explains BenQ's Business Line manager Michael Chen.

BenQ is also prepping an entry-level 4K projector, the £1,000 W1720, although this stripped-back model lacks DCI-P3 support and HDR PRO. It will arrive early Summer.

But that's not all we can expect from the PJ specialist. Chen told HCC the company would introduce a competitively priced 4K ultra-short-throw (UST) beamer with a laser light source before the end of the year. 'You will see UST laser projection from us,' he confirmed. 'We will have one or two models. In the Chinese market, these models, called Screenless TV, are gaining in popularity.'



**The W2700: BenQ's new mid-range 4K DLP projector**

# Onkyo launches 'value-packed' AVRs

TX-SR393 and TX-SR494 ignore networking, focus on Dolby Atmos

**Two additions to Onkyo's home cinema AVR lineup have budget buyers in mind, with one even targeting living room setups where there's no space for surround speakers.**

The five-channel TX-SR393 is in stores now priced at £350, but thanks to onboard Dolby Atmos and DTS:X decoding, and assignable height speaker terminals, it can be used to run a 3.2.2 layout, in addition to traditional 5.1.

Meanwhile, the £450 TX-SR494 integrates seven amplifier channels for 5.2.2 Atmos/DTS:X.

Both receivers feature a single HDMI output and four HDMI inputs catering to 4K HDR (including

Dolby Vision) passthrough. Additional connections include stereo analogue audio inputs, coaxial and optical digital audio ports, 6.35mm headphone jack and powered USB. There's no networking provision, but audio can be streamed via Bluetooth.

Processing features include AccuEQ sound optimization, plus Onkyo's new Vocal Enhancer tool to improve dialogue intelligibility.

Onkyo describes the new models as 'the best-value AV receivers in their class.' [uk.onkyo.com](http://uk.onkyo.com)

**Onkyo's TX-SR494 (£450) is a seven-channel design with Atmos and DTS:X decoding**





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## Press play

Discs spinning your way in the coming month...

### April 22



Alien: 40th Anniversary Ed. (4K)  
 Captain America Trilogy (4K)  
 Dragonwyck (BD)  
 Hollow Man & Hollow Man II: Collector's Edition (BD)  
 Howard the Duck (DVD/BD)  
 The Last Temptation of Christ (BD)  
 Leaving Neverland (DVD/BD)  
 Lilith (BD)  
 Mortal Engines (DVD/BD/4K)  
 Scared Stiff (BD)  
 The Snake Pit (BD)  
 Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse (DVD/BD/4K)

### April 29

303 Squadron (DVD/BD)  
 Au Hasard Balthazar (BD)  
 \*Batteries Not Included (BD)  
 Friday Night Lights: The Complete Collection (BD)  
 Justice League: The Fatal Five (DVD/BD)  
 Romance (BD)

### May 06



A Face in the Crowd (BD)  
 Better Call Saul: Season Four (DVD/BD)  
 The Grand Duel (BD)  
 Hellboy II: The Golden Army (4K)  
 Holmes & Watson (DVD/BD)  
 In the Aftermath (BD)  
 The Karate Kid (4K)

### May 13

The Annihilators (BD)  
 The Big Clock (BD)  
 Bumblebee (DVD/BD/4K)  
 Colette (DVD/BD)  
 Cujo: Limited Edition (BD)  
 Curfew: Season One (DVD/BD)  
 Deutschland 86 (DVD)  
 The Favourite (DVD/BD)  
 The Night of the Generals (BD)  
 November (BD)  
 Yakuza Law (BD)

# Hanna primed for action

High-octane movie from 2011 is reimagined for Amazon Video series

Hanna, the home-schooled assassin on the run from the CIA, has made the jump from movie to TV series. Rebooted by creator David Farr, the show is the latest high-profile addition to Amazon Prime's original content roster.

The film, released in 2011, starred Saoirse Ronan as the original wild child, and Erik Bana as the dad who brings her up in isolation, schooling her in martial arts and encyclopaedic knowledge. This new iteration has Esmé Creed-Miles and Joel Kinnaman assume the roles.

The first few episodes are a mix of new and familiar sequences, but the eight-part show soon charts a fresh kick-ass course.

'Episodes four onwards are entirely new,' explains writer David Farr. 'The beginning of episode one is also completely different to the movie.' Unlike the feature film, this kind of TV has a novelistic quality to it, he adds. 'We writers own it a bit more than we do in movies, which tend to be dominated by directors.'

Farr says he jumped at the opportunity to revisit the character. 'I loved the original, it's a fantastic movie. But director Joe Wright made it way more extreme, more fairy tale. There were things we couldn't do in the movie, in the backstory of Hanna, but that story is perfectly suited to a long-form TV series. I got very excited when this idea began to float. I thought we could do a very different version of the story.'

Farr describes *Hanna* as both a political thriller and a coming of age story. It's like any teenage tale, only with more guns, he quips.

Mireille Enos usurps Cate Blanchett's role as obsessive CIA pursuer. Enos and Kinnaman have worked together before, most notably on the US remake of *The Killing*. 'We knew our next project together had to be something different,' says Kinnaman. 'This is perfect, given the dynamic between the characters. When you work so well together, it's easy; a dance.'

Writer Farr says he penned the characters with a great deal of hidden history, so it was a bonus to



**David Farr:** 'There were things we couldn't do in the movie... but [Hanna's] story is perfectly suited to a long-form TV series'

have actors that could convey a past with just a glance.

The rise of streaming services, willing to bankroll hugely diverse productions, is proving a game-changer for creators, he told *HCC*. 'Amazon has been extremely supportive. Working with them has a simplicity and directness which I really appreciate. Unusually, they've pushed us to be a bit braver. I've always felt the film was weirdly male, but knew this TV series would have a more female-centric quality. They were keen on that. They just said to go with it. I genuinely think not every channel would have taken that risk.'

## Inventing an audience

Farr goes on to describe *Hanna* as super European, with location shooting in Berlin, Morocco, Spain, and a scene-setting Slovakian forest. It's something Amazon was also comfortable with. 'It's in European languages and accents. There's second guessing in television, when networks commission "what the audience wants" – but Amazon doesn't have such a fixed idea. That's liberating. Maybe they're still inventing their audience?'

Kinnaman says that learning languages was the biggest challenge of the show ('particularly German'), rather than the heavy stunt work and fight sequences. 'A few years ago I got really obsessed with Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, it's become of my great passions in life. It's really applicable to stunts and that kind of work. I took Esmé to a Jiu Jitsu school I found in Budapest, to show her how to do a rear naked choke.'

Co-star Mireille Enos is a martial artist too, a black belt in Tae Kwon Do. 'I love it. There was a fight sequence I wanted to shoot all in one take, with no stunt doubles. I got to take two giant men to the ground,' she notes with satisfaction.

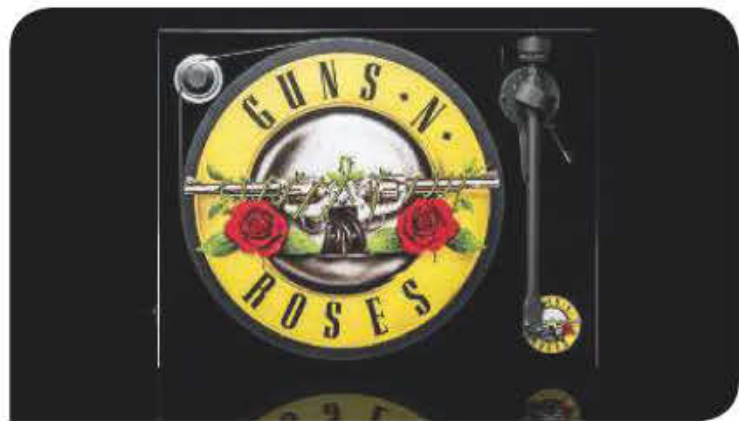
*Hanna* is available now on Amazon Prime Video.



Esmé Creed-Miles takes over from Saoirse Ronan in the title role for Amazon's smallscreen reboot of *Hanna*



## This month's top 10 news stories in handy, bite-sized chunks...



### 1 Sweet turntable o' mine

Having already tackled The Beatles and The Rolling Stones, turntable manufacturer Pro-Ject has released a limited edition Guns n Roses model. Priced around £150, this new Artist Series deck is based on Pro-Ject's Essential III A and, for the first time, sees the brand printing the artwork directly on to the Acryl-IT E platter.

### 2 Sky binges on BBC classics

Sky has partnered with BBC Studios to bring even more BBC boxsets to Sky and Now TV under the UKTV Gold and Alibi brands. Recent additions include *Only Fools and Horses*, *Blackadder*, *The Young Ones*, *McMafia* and *Red Dwarf*, with *Top Gear* and *The League of Gentlemen* due later this year.

### 3 BBFC bruhaha brewing

Independent UK film distributors are calling for an 'urgent review' of the BBFC's charging procedure following the announcement of a deal between the BBFC and Netflix that allows the latter to self-certify its titles and still use official BBFC ratings. Unlike the SVOD operator, physical and digital media distributors still have to pay by the minute for the BBFC to classify their titles.

### 4 TCL's record results

Chinese consumer electronics brand TCL claims that it is now ranked second in the world for TV shipment volumes, with an 11.6 per cent market share. Sales of its LCD TVs during 2018 rose 23.3 per cent year-on-year to 28.6m sets, helping propel the company to a record annual turnover of €5.1bn (11.7 per cent up on 2017).

### 5 Disney-Fox deal done

The Walt Disney Company has completed its acquisition of 21st Century Fox. The \$71.3bn deal sees Disney absorb most of Fox's film and TV divisions, including Marvel's *X-Men*, *Fantastic Four* and *Deadpool* properties, plus the FX and National Geographic cable networks. It also gives Disney 60 per cent ownership of the Hulu streaming service. However, the acquisition is expected to come at the cost of some 4,000 jobs.

### 6 Gender-neutral voice tech

Has the use of female voices for Siri and Alexa left you wondering why AI assistants need to be gendered at all? Well, a team of researchers at Copenhagen Pride claim to have developed the first non-binary personal assistant. Called Q, the voice (chosen from recordings of people who themselves identify as non-binary) has had its pitch and tone altered to a range between 145Hz and 175Hz, which the researchers claim best represents a gender-neutral frequency. Head over to <https://bit.ly/2Tw7uQ4> to give it a listen.

### 7 The final Blockbuster

Following the recent closure of a branch in Australia, there is now just one Blockbuster Video store left in the world. If you fancy visiting, it's based in Bend, Oregon – just don't wait too long as it may well shut soon...

### 8 Focal's 40th

French audio corp Focal turned 40 this year and will be celebrating with a range of 'exceptional sound solutions for the home, in-car and professional studios', all specially developed for the company's 40th birthday. The anniversary range will be unveiled at Munich's High-End Exhibition in May.

### 9 Tidal masters iOS

Music streaming platform Tidal – in partnership with MQA – has announced its 'Masters' quality tracks are now available on iPhone devices (the feature was already available on Android kit) running iOS 11 or above. Masters content is available to those with a Tidal Hi-Fi subscription – currently £20 per month.

### 10 Cranking 'em out in 4K

Lionsgate is bringing Jason Statham actioner *Crank* to Ultra HD Blu-ray in the US on May 21. As the 2006 film was mostly shot using handheld DV cameras we doubt the 4K release will offer much of an image upgrade over the original Blu-ray, beyond better compression. More enticing, however, is the promise of a new Atmos remix and two new featurettes.



## Premiere...

What's happening in the world of TV and films...

### Elba takes aim at DC



Idris Elba is taking over from Will Smith as Deadshot in James Gunn's *Suicide Squad* sequel/reboot, which apparently puts the conflicted killer front-and-centre in the story. Scheduling conflicts are being blamed for Smith dropping out.

### Robot reboot

Legendary Entertainment has hired comic book creator Brian K. Vaughn to script its live-action reboot of the classic giant robot anime *Gundam*. Meanwhile, US network FX has ordered a live-action series based on Vaughn's critically-acclaimed comic *Y: The Last Man*, which will debut in 2020.

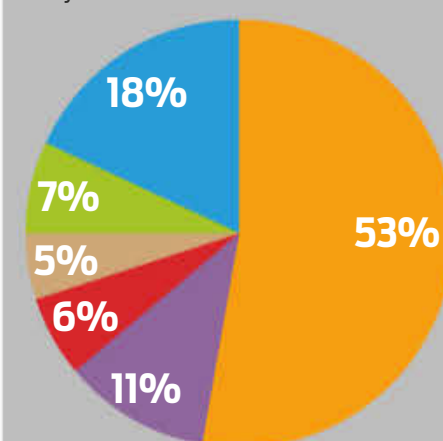
### Spidey-sense tingling!

Following the success of its recent *Spider-Man* films, it should come as no surprise that Sony Pictures has big plans for the franchise. Company honcho Tony Vinciguerra told *Variety* the studio already has plans for the next seven or eight years laid out for 'that asset', including films and TV series.

## We asked...

### Who is the greatest action cinema icon?

- Arnold Schwarzenegger
- Bruce Willis
- Jackie Chan
- Jason Statham
- Sylvester Stallone
- Other



Results from [www.homecinemachoice.com](http://www.homecinemachoice.com)  
Go online for more polling action

OTHERS: CHUCK NORRIS (1%), CHOW YUN-FAT (1%), DWAYNE JOHNSON (3%), JEAN-CLAUDE VAN DAMME (2%), KEANU REEVES (4%), MICHELLE YEOH (1%), STEVEN SEAGAL (1%), WESLEY SNIPES (1%) AND 'I DON'T RATE ANY OF THEM' (4%)





# Franchise gets its buzz back?

Bumblebee → Paramount Home Media Distribution → DVD/Blu-ray/Ultra HD Blu-ray

This 1980s-set prequel/reboot sees Travis Knight replace Michael Bay in the director's chair and takes the *Transformers* franchise back to its roots, aiming to mine nostalgia for the original TV 'toon. *Bumblebee* will make its UK disc debut on May 13, with the

4K release going all-out to dazzle AV-holics with its combination of Dolby Vision HDR grading and Dolby Atmos sonics. Extras will include a five-part *Making of...*, deleted and extended scenes, outtakes, and a look at the robots of Cybertron.







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## Face to Face

Topics of discussion on the *HCC* Facebook page

### On the *Avengers: Endgame* trailer



Yes. I think I may be up for that.  
*Mike Wadkins*

I do love my movies but I'm not too sure I've got the patience for the rumoured three hours running time.

*Lee Regan*

Three hours will soon fly by with how much is gonna be happening.

*Ben Buckley*

WOW.

*Steve Michael Clark*

### What you're watching on your home cinema...



Postie delivered 4K discs of *Robin Hood*, *Pet Sematary* [pictured] and *Mary Queen of Scots* today (had to import that one). Decisions! Decisions!

*Ian Smith*

*Blue Thunder*... good old times.

*Hubert Jedrys*

New Arrow restoration of *Ringu* looks sweet.

*Jason Cheal*

At the moment (but subject to change dependent on how I feel when I get up) the plan for tomorrow is a double-bill of Sean Connery at his prime in *The Wind And The Lion* and Disney classic *Lady And The Tramp*.

*John Hudson*

*The Expendables* trilogy. Great fun. Pity Stallone stopped making 'em!

*Theo Coetzee*

*Aquaman* 4K.

*Baron Mike*

*Spartacus*.

*Walter White*

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# Back of the 'net

Trailers, technology and more to check out on the web



### Batteries not included

Tom Hanks returns as Woody in a fourth instalment in Disney Pixar's premier 'toon franchise *Toy Story* – this time around dealing with a plastic fork (Forky) who doesn't want to be a toy, and reuniting with a long-lost companion. In cinemas 21 June (including 3D). Here's the trailer...

[youtu.be/EhWXOrFZYpo](https://youtu.be/EhWXOrFZYpo)



### Lines of sight

Sony Pictures' *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* animation (reviewed on p90) has a unique look. In this brief but informative video the visual effects boffins reveal how they worked to replicate the hand-drawn 'line work' aesthetic of comics in a CG environment.

[youtu.be/Urq\\_RYMvbyA](https://youtu.be/Urq_RYMvbyA)



### People are strange

Netflix has dropped a trailer for the third season of its breakout hit *Stranger Things*, which will stream this July. Once again we're in Hawkins, Indiana in the mid-1980s, and, well, strange things are afoot. Amidst all the usual sci-fi/fantasy tropes in this promo vid, we think we spotted a *Die Hard* nod too.

[youtu.be/YEG3bmU\\_Wal](https://youtu.be/YEG3bmU_Wal)



### Synthesised cinema

YouTube channel The Discarded Image takes a scholarly look at the electronic soundtracks of 1980s movies (highlighting *The Terminator*, *Thief and Scarface*), although it expands its scope to include *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) and *Drive* (2011). Worth a watch for synth lovers.

[youtu.be/j5typTby6hk](https://youtu.be/j5typTby6hk)



### QT heads to Hollywood

For his ninth movie *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*, Quentin Tarantino turns his attention to late '60s California for a tale of a TV actor (Leonardo DiCaprio), his stunt double (Brad Pitt) and the Manson family murders. We're interested to see how he weaves it all together...

[youtu.be/Scf8nIJCvs4](https://youtu.be/Scf8nIJCvs4)



### Everyone loves Us

*Us*, writer/director Jordan Peele's follow up to 2017's *Get Out*, has enjoyed a \$70m+ opening weekend Stateside that ranks as the best ever in March for an original (e.g. not a sequel/remake/adaptation) movie. Number crunchers can check out Box Office Mojo for more stats.

[www.boxofficemojo.com](https://www.boxofficemojo.com)



# Let's get spherical

Cabasse Eole 4 5.1 → [www.cabasse.com](http://www.cabasse.com)

Cabasse's fourth generation of its Eole 5.1 speaker system champions smart looks and affordable surround sound. The Eole 4 5.1, which sells for £900 and is available in both black and white iterations, partners five spherical satellite speakers with a new 'Super Slim' subwoofer. The satellites all use a coaxial drive unit, with 29mm tweeter and 4in midbass, while the sub's 8.25in woofer gets a 400W peak amplifier. Cabasse's magnetic mounting bases allow for shelf- or wall-mounting, and positioning flexibility.

Each Eole 4 satellite uses a coaxial tweeter/midbass driver





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# 'No one wants to listen to just a subwoofer'

**Gary Yacoubian**, president of SVS, discusses the brand's new SB-3000 subwoofer, cylinder designs and testing with Taylor Swift. Questions: **Mark Craven**





**Two years ago SVS launched the 16-Ultra series, then followed with the SB-4000. Now you have the SB-3000. Is this the normal way you work – trying out new tech on higher-end models and then trickling it down?**

The 16-Ultra was our exercise in trying to bring reference performance to a price point where it hadn't been before. Obviously I'm biased – they're my children – but the SB16-Ultra won the EISA Award in 2017. It's an amazing subwoofer and really represents us well in that it's winning awards over products that cost two, three times as much. So we're really proud of that.

But we're challenging ourselves to extend reference performance to prices that include more people. Even though the 16-Ultra is a steal at £2,500, not everybody has £2,500 for a subwoofer. So then came the SB-4000, using the same amplifier platform, just less powerful – 1,200W continuous rather than 1,500W continuous. But it's the same digital amplifier, exactly the same Analog Devices DSP to configure the subwoofer, and the same smartphone Bluetooth app control.

We brought that out at £1,800. I don't want to say 'making it cheaper' as it makes us sound like something we don't want to be, but we do want to include more people.

Now we come to the 3000 Series. This features an all-new 13in driver. It's completely unrelated, a design from the ground up that bears no resemblance to the driver that's in the 4000 Series. And it's a smokin' good driver. It's super-quick. It's light but it's capable of moving lots of air.

But a driver is really only potential. The question was could we extend that same 16-Ultra/4000 Series platform to an amplifier that would be in this price range of £1,275.

**Did you need a new driver because you're using a less powerful amp? Why not just use the previous 13in design?**

Because that driver is massively expensive. Putting that driver into any subwoofer is going to make it cost what the 4000 Series cost.

I consider the SB-3000 almost a little magic trick, in terms of what it does for the price and what it does for the size.

The hard part is to get the amplifier. It was a lot of work to bring that platform to an 800W of [continuous] power design. And, again, it uses the exact same Analog Devices chip. Here's a good thing – the more products we have using things like that, there's a little bit of economies of scale.

About 10 months ago as the first prototypes were being measured our chief designer called me and said: 'Are you sure you want to do this? It's so close to the 4000 Series that it's probably going to cannibalise that world.' But I'm like, that's what we do. We're not one of these luxury car companies where they're afraid to have the lower model be better in anyway than the higher model. We want to keep pushing the envelope.



### When did work start on the 3000 Series? What's the timeframe for your subwoofer development?

The 16-Ultra was a massive project because it was a totally new driver, with an 8in edge wound voice coil that nobody's ever done – at least not in the consumer realm – and we'd never done 16in [drivers], because we don't like the way larger drivers behave in terms of their accuracy. Our team solved it with the voice coil, but that was a long, long project. A speaker design, if you really care about it, you're looking at every aspect of it, and going through prototype after prototype.

The amp was a new project too. So I would say the technology that ended up in the 16-Ultra took in the neighbourhood of three years to develop. You don't normally want to take that long. But the benefit was on the day we locked down the design of the 16-Ultra we were able to immediately get to work on the 4000 Series. We already basically had that 13in driver from the old 13-Ultra series, we did some modifications to it and we worked on making the amplifier that we'd developed fit into that price range.

The 3000 Series was always in my mind. So kind of in parallel, the driver development went on but we didn't think we'd be able to make the amp. There was a lot of back and forth.

I'm proud of the 3000 Series. It's rock-solid in execution, it has a really good low-frequency extension, it's quick and accurate and musical and that's what you want. We want to make subwoofers that totally kick ass, but we don't want to do it in a way that's not realistic. We don't want a subwoofer that draws attention to itself.

### Some subwoofer brands go for 18in or even 21in drivers and some brands have dual configurations. Nearly all of yours are single driver, front-facing models...

I'm never going to criticise what other people do, but here's what I think. First of all, we like front-facing drivers for a lot of reasons. They're easier to install. Down-firing drivers can create their own problems in terms of room anomalies. But also somebody who wants to put it in a cabinet or something like that, they're totally out of luck if that have a downfiring driver. If it's front-firing it's much more flexible.

I also think in the audiophile world it's more direct in terms of its delivery. One of the things we try to do in all our designs is make sure that the subwoofer is interacting with the room as little as possible. In that way it will be in agreement with the passive speakers and create a convincing experience that works with them, instead of drawing attention to itself.

### So we shouldn't expect to see an 18in driver in an SVS sub?

I'll never say never, but we had huge issues with these larger drivers and we finally figured it out with the edge wound voice coil we designed, but that voice coil, just to say, does consume some power, so it requires this massively powerful amplifier. In order to create a design with an 18in... We could do it – but would that even fit in someone's



The PC-4000: 'You really stepped up if you put a cylinder in your room...'

room? That's the question. My suspicion is you'd be better off with two of our SB-4000s than you would with an 18in version of our SB-16 Ultra.

### As a brand, do you recommend that people always try and use twin subs in a room rather than one?

Twenty-five per cent of our subwoofers go out in dual configuration. The reason is not that you need all this extra horsepower to fill the room with bass, but to remove as much as possible room anomalies from bass cancellation and standing waves.

Usually dual is better. However, if you're compromising the technology in order to get two then you may be making a mistake. For example, our 2000 Series is our best-selling sub, but two of them is not going to be better than a single SB-4000, because the technology is just superior. And that matters too. Although if you had a room that was really messed up, then you might actually compromise on the technology and get two.

### Or four?

Or four, whatever. Three. It doesn't have to be symmetrical. In fact, asymmetrical can be better for subs. It's almost three anywhere in the room will make a huge difference. You don't even have to think about it. But I don't see that often. It's always usually 1, 2 or 4.

### What discs/films does SVS use when evaluating its subs?

You have a combination of things you do. One thing, when you're measuring a subwoofer you have to go outside, because the waves are so massive you can't do it indoors. So we do a lot of measuring.

As far as films/discs go, I have a vast list and some are ones you wouldn't think of. I'll listen to Yo-Yo Ma playing Bach's cello suites to see, 'Does it sound like a cello?' That's the interesting thing. I'll listen to a



The Prime Wireless speakers integrate a 100W amp, hi-res DAC and Amazon Alexa voice control



song by Taylor Swift, called *Clean*. I'll listen to that because it's got this recurring low note. Does it sound like a note or does it sound boomy? Is the subwoofer keeping up with the content? There's a Nine Inch Nails album called *Hesitation Marks* where there are some tracks near the very end where the bass is just massive and very difficult to control. It's a huge torture test for a subwoofer.

We try all different kinds of things but a lot of times, I'm like, does it sound like music? Is it convincing me that it's really happening? *Mad Max: Fury Road* – that's a great demo. *Tron: Legacy* – I don't think it did well for Disney but it's an excellent demo and really tests a lot of things about a sub.

### What makes a good subwoofer?

First – low-frequency extension. That seems obvious, right? Subs should do that. But all our subwoofers, except one, extend below 20Hz, below human hearing. The SB-1000 we rate to 23Hz. And that's still pretty damn low.

Many of the subwoofers that live in the price range that we're in don't have the ability to deliver that level of deep bass so they exaggerate the mid-bass. And then you get this kind of boomy one-note bass and we don't want to do that.

Secondly, doing it at whatever volume level the user wants. Some subs limit the amplifier so that it can only play so loud. Passive full-range speakers just do what they are told, they're not smart, so when you're cranking up your home theatre the speakers are playing very loud whereas the sub will only play as loud as its limiter allows. At that moment where you want to impress your neighbours or have your neighbours call the police, the subwoofer sort of says 'I can't do any more', and that's the moment where you want it the most.

The third thing is an accurate frequency response – we use our DSP to have our response to be as flat as possible – and the fourth is speed and transient response. Our subs are really quick and it's something we're proud of. Even our ported subwoofers... ported designs aren't typically known for great transient response.

Lastly, seamless integration with passive speakers. Because no one wants to listen to just a subwoofer. Trust me, I've done it for hours. It's not fun, it's torture. What you want is a total experience.

If a sub does all that well, it's a great subwoofer and I don't care what brand it is. And then Taylor Swift sounds like Taylor Swift.

### As well as your sealed and ported subs, you have the cylinder models – do they sell well?

It's something that people who have them really like. I think it's because they're just different and they're cool. We'll have retailers who say they just want to have it there to show people. Maybe five to seven per cent of our business is the cylinder. Not much. But they're great and they're a signature of what we do and I have more people come up to me and say I bought that cylinder from you, and they're proud of it, and they know I know that's a cool thing. You really stepped up if you put a cylinder in your room!



SVS makes both sealed and ported versions (pictured) of all its subwoofers

The ported ones drop a bit lower [than sealed models] and have a bit more output. We worked hard to blow away the assumption about the differences between ported and sealed; we've tried to narrow the gap. Sealed subs are known for not having great output but are usually less expensive and fit in rooms, so we've worked to give them a greater output and low-frequency extension.

And ported subs are typically so massive and the belief is that they're slower and less accurate. We've worked to have more nuance in terms of delivery. They do have a little more output than our sealed boxes but we roll that back a bit so you have accuracy and musicality and you don't feel that you can't play every kind of content.

### What's next for SVS?

I'm interested in smart, wireless powered speakers, and we recently launched our Prime Wireless.

We think the audio world is dominated by a belief that no one, except very few people, cares about great sound any more. Whereas we think people love great sound but nobody's talking to them. I'm interested to see if we can do more things and do things differently. But whatever we do it will always be about bringing great sound to more people and not being insanely expensive so you feel you have to mortgage the house.

**'We are looking at trying to build wirelessness into our subwoofers so that it's just automatic'**

### What about wireless subwoofers?

You took the words right out of my mouth. We have a wireless adapter now and it works well, but we are looking at trying to build wirelessness into subwoofers so that it's just automatic – [whether] you can build the receiver into the sub so then you'd just need to add the transmitter.

### Soundbar owners get wireless subs. A standard across AVRs and subwoofers would be great...

There's some stuff going on at WiSA [Wireless Speaker and Audio Association] that maybe could do that. If you have a soundbar you probably don't care about latency. But our customers do ■



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# LIGHTS, CAMERA ACTION!

*The Matrix* celebrates its 20th birthday this year, but where does it rank amidst the greatest action movies of all time? Team *HCC* turns the clock back to the 1980s to highlight explosive hits from that decade to the present day – and outlines its definitive Top 10... >





### DRAGONS FOREVER

The last and arguably best of the trio of 'Three Dragons' movies featuring Jackie Chan, Yuen Biao and Sammo Hung, this 1988 martial arts classic finds them at their very best and comes to a close with a barnstorming finale that gives each a chance to shine – as well as offering Chan a welcome rematch with Benny 'The Jet' Urquidez.



### ARMOUR OF GOD

Chan's 1986 Indiana Jones-inspired martial arts adventure will always be remembered as the film where he almost died when a stunt went wrong (Chan cracked his skull in a 5m fall). However, even if you take that out of the equation, *Armour of God* is a rip-roaring flick packed with breathtaking action.



### PROJECT A

Another Chan, Biao, Hung teamup, 1983's *Project A* whisks the trio back to the 19th Century to battle pirates. In amongst the action is one of Chan's best-known stunts, which sees him hanging off (and then falling from, via several canopies) a 60ft clock tower in a homage to silent movie daredevil Buster Keaton.

## 1980s: ARNIE REIGNS SUPREME IN MUSCLE-BOUND DECADE

### PREDATOR

Almost a film of two halves, both of them brilliantly executed. At first we join Arnold Schwarzenegger and his bicep-bulging buddies on a cross-border rescue mission, complete with an explosion-filled set-piece assault, then we head into sci-fi territory as the Austrian Oak must face up to an otherworldly enemy with just his wits (and fists) to save him.

Directed by John McTiernan in 1987, *Predator* has easily stood the test of time – a practically flawless example of an original idea.



### LETHAL WEAPON

Director Richard Donner and writer Shane Black took the 'buddy' movie template laid down by the likes of *48 Hrs.* and polished it to perfection in this 1987 classic. Mel Gibson's psychotic cop and Danny Glover's family man detective are the duo thrown together to unravel the death of a young woman, leading to heroin smugglers and a rain-soaked scrap with Gary Busey's sadistic villain Mr Joshua. Three sequels ramped up the humour, but none had the rich blend of gags and guns here.



### COMMANDO

Director Mark L. Lester didn't go on to do much, but this 1985 lone soldier flick cemented Arnold Schwarzenegger's place at the top of the action tree, coming hot on the heels of *The Terminator* and *Conan the Barbarian*. The plot is almost unbelievably silly, with Schwarzenegger's former special forces grunt (John Matrix) forced out of retirement to rescue his kidnapped daughter, but the story builds to a wonderfully OTT final sequence that showers your cinema room with shrapnel and one-liners.



### ALIENS

Fresh off his debut hit *The Terminator* and working on a first draft of *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, hot-shot filmmaker James Cameron was tapped to write and direct the 1986 sequel to Ridley Scott's *Alien*. Sigourney Weaver returns to the role of Ripley, now transformed into a full-fledged action heroine (albeit one who retains her maternal side), as she joins a platoon of Marines heading to the planetoid where her nightmare began for a 'bug hunt' like no other. As the tag-line promised, 'This time it's war...'

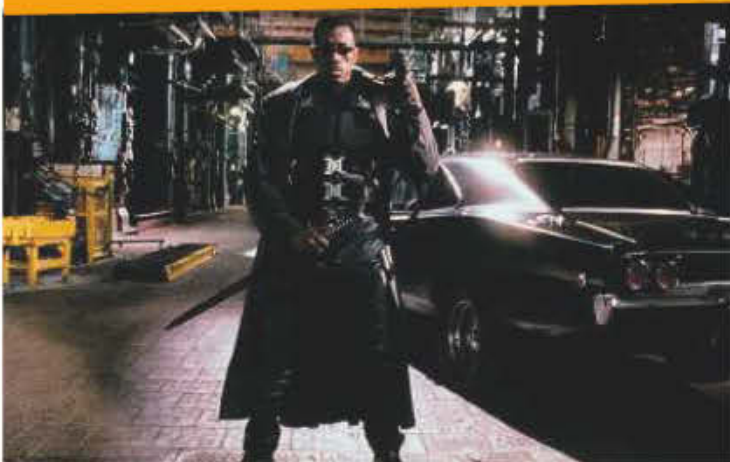


### ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK

Home to the coolest action hero to ever grace the bigscreen, John Carpenter's testosterone-drenched 1981 dystopian flick follows swaggering anti-hero Snake Plissken (Kurt Russell) on a one-man mission to save the US President (Donald Pleasance) when Air Force One crashes in the middle of the walled-off prison that was once Manhattan Island. This cracking film's legacy endures through a disappointing sequel (*Escape from L.A.*), the *Metal Gear Solid* games, and countless Italian imitators/rip-offs.



## 1990s: CAGE FIGHTING AND CAMERON CLASSICS



### BLADE

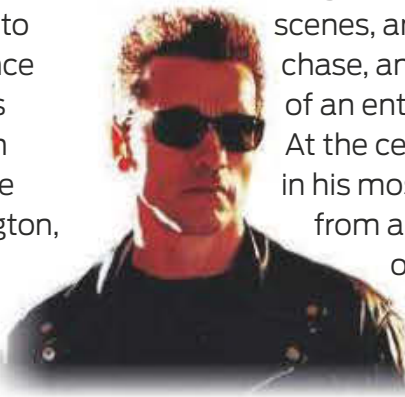
Hard as it may be to believe, there was a time – not too long ago – when superheroes didn't rule the box office and Marvel Comics was filing for bankruptcy and licensing its characters to any interested studio. Produced by horror specialist New Line, this 1998 flick about a kung-fu-kicking, sword-swinging half-vampire who protects humans from the undead didn't change things overnight. But it did show that it was possible to take a more 'adult' approach to superhero films – and that there was an audience ready and waiting for it. The film's success rests almost entirely on the shoulders of leading man Wesley Snipes (who was clearly born to play the super-cool Blade) and director Stephen Norrington, who ensures it has style and energy to spare.

An equally badass sequel followed in 2002 helmed by Guillermo del Toro. 2004's *Blade: Trinity*, however, is best forgotten.



### TERMINATOR 2: JUDGMENT DAY

While 1984's *The Terminator* was a low-budget marvel, its blockbuster 1991 sequel aimed bigger. Director/co-writer James Cameron flips the premise (turning star Arnold Schwarzenegger into the hero), makes impressive use of cutting-edge computer-generated FX, and throws millions of dollars at its showcase set-pieces. The action here mixes wall-destroying Terminator vs Terminator fight



scenes, an eye-opening truck/bike chase, and a bullet-strewn takedown of an entire police force via minigun. At the centre of it all is Schwarzenegger in his most iconic role, slowly evolving from a slow-talking 'cybernetic organism' to a character that feels almost human, and given a poignant send off (it's okay, he came back. Kinda).



### SPEED

A new breed of action flick arrived in the form of this 1994 smash directed by Jan De Bont. Star Keanu Reeves was hardly muscle-bound, nor prone to wisecracks, and his antagonist (Dennis Hopper) is barely onscreen for much of the movie. Yet the premise (don't stop the bus!) enables 110-odd minutes of heart-pounding tension, as Reeves and co-star Sandra Bullock try to come up with a plan while steering the no. 2525 through LA streets – and over half-finished freeway flyovers. Bookended by two well-handled sequences, *Speed* is a blast from start to finish. It's a shame the Reeves-less sequel wasn't.



### TRUE LIES

Another Cameron/Schwarzenegger teamup (from 1994), but this time played for laughs and with a deliberate aim of being the boldest action movie ever made.

Harry Tasker is a super-spy who could give James Bond a run for his money, but unlike 007 he has a wife and child to look after and keep out of the loop. His work-life balance comes a cropper, however, when both he and his wife are captured by terrorists, who then kidnap his daughter, too.

*Last Action Hero* (1993) had already seen Schwarzenegger toying with his action star image, but this outing is more assured. Cameron is clearly having fun pushing the envelope, and in the final act delivers two fantastic set-pieces – a helicopter rescue in the Florida Keys, and Arnie saving the day while piloting a Harrier Jump Jet. If it's big, bold stunts you seek, look here. Just don't look for it on Blu-ray...



### THE ROCK

Producer Jerry Bruckheimer found his action cinema partner in crime in the shape of director Michael Bay, leading to a trio of hits in the mid/late '90s including *Bad Boys* (1995) and *Armageddon* (1998). Released between them in 1996 was this deliciously energetic Alcatraz heist movie.

Nicolas Cage headlines as chemical weapons expert Dr Stan Goodspeed, supported by Sean Connery as a former escapee from 'The Rock' – both are roped in when Ed Harris's ex-soldier takes control of the island prison and threatens to launch a gas attack on San Francisco.

The movie sees Bay fine-tuning his style. Armed with a huge (for the time) budget of \$75m, he constructs a succession of action sequences (including a notable car-chase), all lensed with a sense of seriousness that others might have eschewed.



### CON AIR

When a group of inmates led by criminal mastermind Cyrus 'The Virus' Grissom (John Malkovich) hijack a flying prison transport taking them to a new supermax facility, they haven't counted on imprisoned former Army Ranger Cameron Poe (Nic Cage) and his unshakable desire to meet his daughter for the first time and give her a toy bunny. The feature debut of director Simon West, *Con Air* (1997) is Jerry Bruckheimer cinema personified; absolutely every aspect of the film, from the characters to the size and number of explosions, is completely over-the-top. Trash? Sure. But it's oh-so entertaining all the same.



## 2000s: BOND IS BACK AND CAMERAS GET SHAKY...



## THE BOURNE SUPREMACY

2002 saw the arrival of a younger and edgier competitor for 007's crown with Doug Liman's *The Bourne Identity*. Adapted from a novel by Robert Ludlum and starring Matt Damon as an amnesiac secret agent, the film was a hit with audiences seeking a more contemporary take on the spy genre.

However, it was the 2004 follow-up *The Bourne Supremacy* that elevated the burgeoning franchise into something truly special and cemented its place in the action movie pantheon. Incoming director Paul Greengrass brought an unmatched sense of pseudo-documentary rawness and visceral intensity to the sequel's bruising fight scenes and car chases with his use of hand-held cameras and rapid-fire editing. For good or ill, it's an aesthetic that has dominated the action genre ever since.

And you don't have to look too far to see the seismic impact the film had on the Bond franchise...



## CASINO ROYALE

The 2002 James Bond flick *Die Another Day* fared fairly well at the box office, but the franchise still appeared to be on life support. Out went Pierce Brosnan as the M16 spook and the sci-fi gadgets – in came Daniel Craig, armed mainly with a Walther.

*Casino Royale* (2006) wasn't a complete overhaul (director Martin Campbell had previously shot 1995's *GoldenEye*), but more a return to the character's roots (and based on Ian Fleming's first Bond novel). There are the travelogue locations, double-crosses and women to be wooed, but there's also a straightforward approach to the setup and execution that quickens the pulse; action scenes are numerous and expertly staged (particularly the parkour-inspired Bond vs Mollaka chase), and the violence feels real rather than tongue-in-cheek. And Craig's assured performance as the hot-headed young agent ties it all together.



## DISTRICT 13

The spiritual successor to the films Jackie Chan was making in his heyday, this 2004 French action flick was notable for the casting of David Belle, the man regarded as the founder of parkour (aka 'free running'), as one of its leads. What follows proves that it doesn't matter how unoriginal a plot may be, just so long as you pack it with insane action.



## THE TRANSPORTER

Jason Statham launched his successful career with this fight-fuelled B-movie (2002) written by Luc Besson. The plot is back-of-an-envelope stuff, but no matter: it's a vehicle to throw Statham's anti-hero into a series of challenges where he can put his driving, punching and parachuting skills to good use. Corey Yuen choreographs the fisticuffs.



## TAKEN

Liam Neeson raises eyebrows as a part-time dad, full-time CIA hardman with a particular set of skills in Pierre Morel's 2008 brutal box office barnstormer. The fun here comes from the relentless pace injected into its 90-minute runtime, and seeing Neeson totally reinvent himself as a man of action.



## RAMBO

In the 20 years between *Rambo III* and this 2008 sequel, Sylvester Stallone had flitted between comedy, drama and action with varying degrees of success (for every *Cliffhanger* there was a *Get Carter*). Donning the headband once again seemed to give the writer/director a new focus; in *Rambo* he delivers one of his most straightforward (and enjoyable) movies in yonks.

We meet the grizzled veteran once again living a quiet life in Thailand, breeze through the obligatory will he/won't he mission setup, and then join him on a journey into Myanmar to bring his artillery-based form of retribution down on dictators.

There's a broad-brush approach to the Good vs Evil storyline, but this all helps to make the film's (frequently very violent) action beats hit harder. When Stallone grabs hold of that .50 calibre machine-gun, it's time to run for cover.



## KILL BILL VOL: 1

When it was first announced that Quentin Tarantino's 2003 movie would be an action-packed revenge thriller, it's safe to say it caused some headscratching. As much as audiences loved his three previous films (*Reservoir Dogs*, *Pulp Fiction* and *Jackie Brown*) there was a lot more talking than action in them – and the violence they contained was employed more for shock value than thrills. We needn't have worried. Fuelled by his love of classic Hong Kong samurai movies and Japanese Yakuza thrillers, and aided by legendary Chinese fight choreographer Yuen Woo-ping (*Drunken Master*, *The Matrix*), Tarantino served-up a delirious grindhouse throwback that culminates with seven unforgettable minutes of Uma Thurman's Bride slicing her way through an army of henchmen.





## 2010s: MARVEL UPS THE ANTE, REEVES RUNS WILD



### CAPTAIN AMERICA: THE WINTER SOLDIER

The irony of superhero movies being the dominant form of modern action cinema is that the actual action scenes are frequently their weakest parts. The problem is one of escalation, with the filmmakers being so concerned about ramping up the scale of the onscreen action that it typically devolves to a bunch of CGI blobs running around and bumping into other CGI blobs.

Enter 2014's *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*. Taking a slightly more grounded approach

to its plotting *and* action, this Marvel sequel mostly forgoes lasers and other such comic book trappings for the simple thrill of watching highly-skilled men (and women) kicking lumps out of one another. Having set out its stall early on with Cap's mighty hand-to-hand brawl with terrorist Batroc (pictured), the real highlight comes later when Cap and chums find themselves caught up in a *Heat*-inspired highway shootout with the Winter Soldier and his goons.



### NINJA: SHADOW OF A TEAR

There are two types of action movie fans: those who have heard of Scott Adkins and those that haven't. Despite supporting roles (usually as heavies) in big-budget efforts like *The Expendables 2* and *Doctor Strange*, the English martial arts expert has carved out his own niche starring in Direct-to-Video action films. And they don't get any better than this 2013 sequel, which uses its refreshingly uncomplicated revenge plot as the springboard for Adkins to showcase his astonishing martial arts skills in a series of bravura, bone-crunching fights.



### JOHN WICK

This exceptional 2014 flick bristles with originality, creating an iconic character for star Keanu Reeves to sink his teeth into, and a ready-made criminal underworld with its own rules and Continental Hotel safe-house. The fresh feeling is reinforced by its directors' (Chad Stahelski and David Leitch) approach to action and Jonathan Sela's colour-infused cinematography. The close-combat scenes wear Asian cinema influences, but never feel derivative. The follow-up flick is equally impressive, expanding on the Wick world without suffering bloat.



### MAD MAX: FURY ROAD

Tom Hardy goes from A to B and back to A again in George Miller's visually arresting, petrol-powered reawakening of Max Rockatansky. *Fury Road* (2015) is a film that doesn't so much have a plot as a desire to just keep on truckin', laying on one thrill-scene after another as its heroes (Hardy's Max, Charlize Theron's Imperator Furiosa and Nicholas Hoult's Nux) realise their escape plan is futile and their only chance is to head back for the mother of all battles. Cue armoured trucks, flamethrowers and a man in a red jumpsuit wielding a guitar. Glorious entertainment.



### THE EXPENDABLES

Sylvester Stallone pays homage to '80s cinema in this muscular 2010 tale of a gang of mercenaries. As well as the expected final act heroics, this film succeeds via its exceptional cast, including Dolph Lundgren, Jet Li, Jason Statham, Gary Daniels and some big-name cameos. Watch the superior Director's Cut if you can.



### FAST FIVE

The street racer series graduated to action franchise in 2011, helped in part by the introduction of Dwayne Johnson as Agent Hobbs. The Rio de Janeiro bank vault sequence is an undoubted standout (and a perennial demo fave); an audacious, premier slice of stunt co-ordination that always raises a smile.



### AVENGERS: INFINITY WAR

The daddy of ensemble movies, Marvel's mega-hit (2018) juggles its numerous superheroes surprisingly well, and doesn't let its sprawling narrative get in the way of delivering the onscreen pyrotechnics. The dual battles in Wakanda and on Titan that close the flick are edge-of-your-seat stuff.

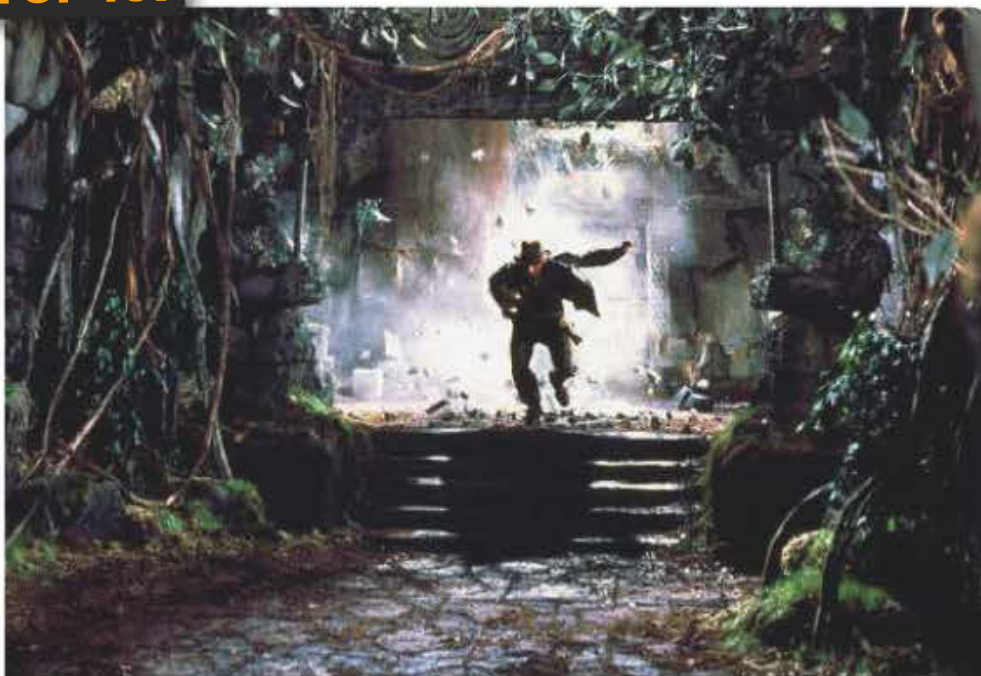


## TEAM HCC'S ACTION TOP 10!



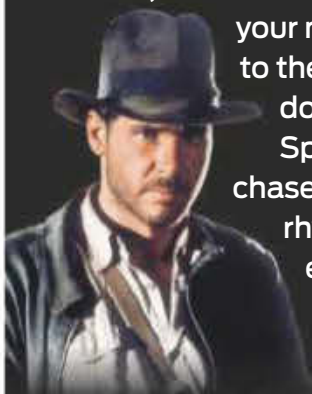
## 10. THE RAID

Welsh director Gareth Evans and Indonesian martial arts star Iko Uwais first came to the attention of action junkies with 2006's *Merantau*. However, it's the pair's next project, the fast and furious *The Raid* (2011), that ensures they'll always have a place in the action movie firmament. Uwais excels as the rookie member of an elite police squad raiding a tower block controlled by a ruthless drug lord. Trying to reach their target on the 30th floor becomes a battle against overwhelming odds, resulting in an endless (and astonishingly brutal) parade of close-quarter combat and acrobatics, shot and edited with aplomb. A more expansive, but less intensely focused, sequel followed in 2014. A third was announced, but never made.



## 9. RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK

The opening sequence of Steven Spielberg's 1981 classic tells you all you need to know about the movie as a whole – there will be stunts, there will be tongues in cheeks, and Indiana Jones is your new favourite hero. And while doffing a fedora to the adventure serials of the 1940s, *Raiders...* doesn't feel like it's digging over old ground. Spielberg is in his element, choreographing chases and fights with an eye for detail, an energetic rhythm, and sight gags a plenty, all of them given extra vigour by John Williams' superb score. It's a big-budget bonanza that's been often imitated, but never bettered.



## 8. ONG-BAK

By the mid-2000s cinema was in need of a new martial arts superstar. Chan and Li's best days were behind them, while Seagal and Van Damme had been relegated to DTV duds. For one brief moment in 2003 it looked like somebody had stepped up to claim the mantle. *Ong-Bak* saw Tony Jaa transition from stuntman to leading man, playing a young Thai villager in search of a stolen statue; the Bangkok underworld quickly learns not to mess with a master of Muay Thai, and we are treated to some of the most audacious stunts and scraps this side of a 1980s Jackie Chan film. Sadly, Jaa's career never hit the same heights again, and these days you'll find him in supporting roles in *xXx: Return of Xander Cage* and *Fast & Furious 7*.



## 7. THE TERMINATOR

For lean, efficient B-movie mastery, look no further than James Cameron's official feature film debut, which clanked and crashed into cinemas in 1984.

Time-travel shenanigans play their part, but once you're beyond the film's future-set opening you're left with a tight, fast-paced chase movie, bolstered by one of cinema's all-time great antagonists – a machine that will try vainly to sweet talk its way into a police station but then decide it's far easier to drive into it.

Schwarzenegger is sublime in the title role, while Linda Hamilton's Sarah Connor and Michael Biehn's Reese are perfect counterfoils, pitting human resourcefulness against technology. Most vitally, Cameron's budget constraints lead to an economy of style; action scenes (such as the garage chase) are stripped down to the bare essentials.



## 6. POLICE STORY

There comes a point in pretty much all vintage Jackie Chan flicks where it becomes (painfully) clear that health and safety was an alien concept and those involved must have been keeping their fingers crossed they would make it to the end alive. That moment in 1985's *Police Story* arrives almost at the start as Chan's cop jumps in a car and pursues a group of criminals through a shanty town, with stuntmen diving out of the way at the last possible second as vehicles bounce through ramshackle buildings. It's an arresting set-piece (one that Michael Bay 'borrowed' almost 20 years later for *Bad Boys II*), but it's only a taste of the risk to life-and-limb Chan asks of himself, his co-stars and his stunt team. Boasting some of the greatest stunts and fight choreography you'll ever see, this breathless love-child of Bruce Lee and Buster Keaton ranks as Chan's finest hour (well, 100 minutes).





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### 5. MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE – ROGUE NATION

These days any actor can become an action star. Not very proficient in any fighting style? Don't worry, filmmakers can cut around your lack of moves in the edit suite. Not keen on doing your own stunts? No problem, tech boffins can just digitally map your face onto a stuntman. This all makes Hollywood superstar Tom Cruise's willingness to endanger himself for his 'art' all the more impressive.

Just look at the fifth instalment in the *Mission: Impossible* series, 2015's *...Rogue Nation*. Not only is it the best entry in the seemingly unstoppable action-spy franchise, but production saw Cruise hanging on to the outside of a plane as it took off and flew to 5,000ft, and learning to hold his breath for over six minutes (!) to shoot a daring underwater vault heist. The result is an action spectacular that feels like the real deal.



### 3. HARD BOILED

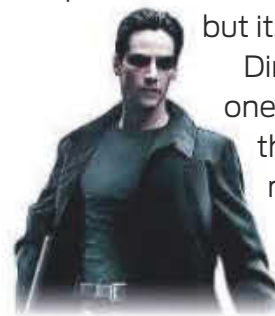
An obsessive Hong Kong cop (Chow Yun-fat) teams up with an undercover officer posing as a Triad assassin (Tony Leung) to avenge the death of his best friend. On paper it sounds like the sort of thing you've seen countless times before, but in the hands of filmmaker John Woo it becomes far more interesting. Having already wowed audiences with his earlier *A Better Tomorrow* and *The Killer*, Woo's near-balletic way of choreographing the violent gunplay that runs through this 1992 film transforms *Hard Boiled* into something verging on beautiful. And until you've seen Chow Yun-fat cradle a baby in one arm, hold a pistol in the other and sing a lullaby while blowing away bad guys, you don't know what you've been missing.

Is it any wonder that Woo's fans found his later Hollywood efforts (think *Paycheck*) a letdown after enjoying masterpieces like this?



### 4. THE MATRIX

The decade ended with a bullet-time bang when this Keanu Reeves sci-fi extravaganza landed in multiplexes in 1999 and sent action fans into a frenzy – it's hard to think of another big-budget Hollywood movie that's so focused on the style, movement and spectacle of its set-pieces. *The Matrix* may come loaded with philosophical subtext, but its primary goal is to dazzle.



Directing duo (and writers) The Wachowskis had one other feature (small-budget *thriller* *Bound*) under their belts, but proved up to the task of turning their mind-bending ideas into reality, aided by the commitment of Reeves, the wire-fu skill of Yuen Woo-ping, and some innovative camerawork and visual effects. Altogether now: 'Guns. Lots of guns.'



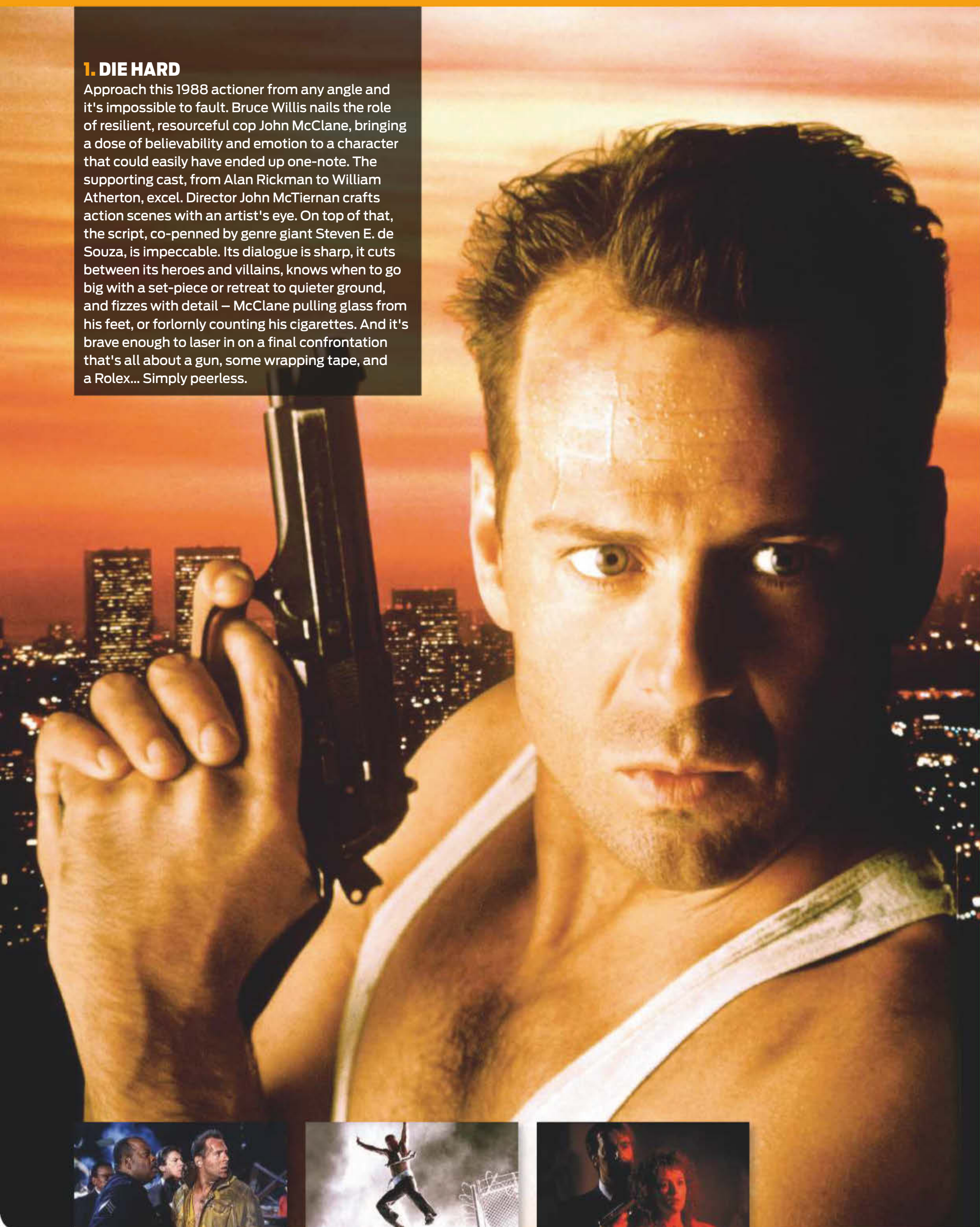
### 2. ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA

It looked like the days were numbered for the traditional Hong Kong martial arts movie toward the end of the 1980s, as local audiences favoured contemporary action vehicles like Jackie Chan's *Police Story* (see p30). But the genre bounced back in supreme style in 1991 when writer-director-producer Tsui Hark teamed up with Jet Li to tackle the story of 19th Century Chinese folk hero Wong Fei-hung. The character had already been the focus of some 70-odd films and TV shows by that time, yet Hark and Li's take became the new reference point. It's a film with epic scope, political commentary and – most important of all – myriad astonishing wire-fu scraps (once again overseen by Yuen Woo-ping) that would go on to have a major influence on the likes of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *The Matrix*. Modern martial arts movies don't get any better.



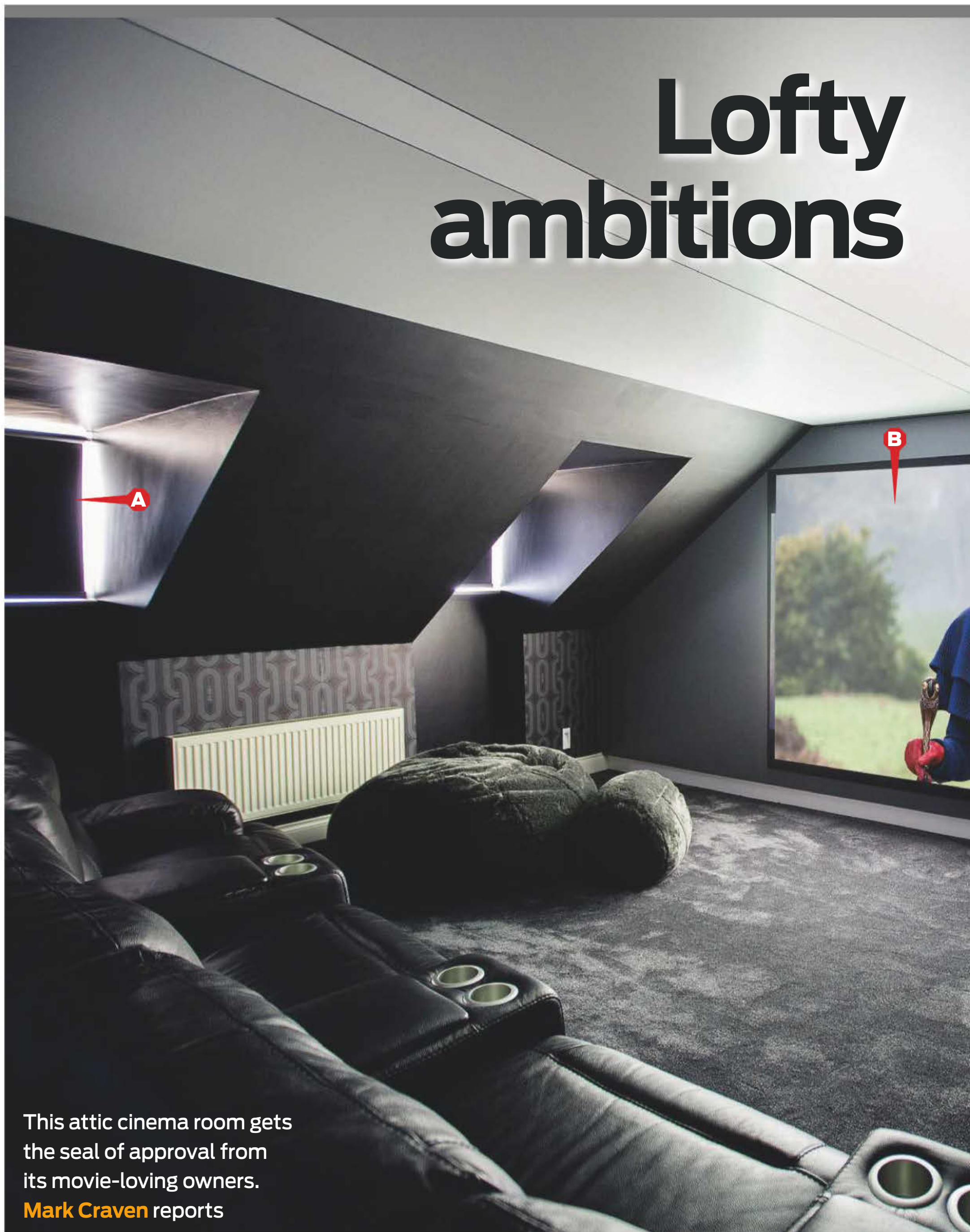
## 1. DIE HARD

Approach this 1988 actioner from any angle and it's impossible to fault. Bruce Willis nails the role of resilient, resourceful cop John McClane, bringing a dose of believability and emotion to a character that could easily have ended up one-note. The supporting cast, from Alan Rickman to William Atherton, excel. Director John McTiernan crafts action scenes with an artist's eye. On top of that, the script, co-penned by genre giant Steven E. de Souza, is impeccable. Its dialogue is sharp, it cuts between its heroes and villains, knows when to go big with a set-piece or retreat to quieter ground, and fizzes with detail – McClane pulling glass from his feet, or forlornly counting his cigarettes. And it's brave enough to laser in on a final confrontation that's all about a gun, some wrapping tape, and a Rolex... Simply peerless.





# Lofty ambitions



This attic cinema room gets the seal of approval from its movie-loving owners.

**Mark Craven** reports



## KIT CHECKLIST

**STEWART FILMSCREEN:** Fixed-frame projector screen, 3m-wide  
**SONY:** VPL-VW320ES 4K HDR projector

**BOWERS & WILKINS:** In-wall/in-ceiling speaker system

**YAMAHA:** Power/processing

**RTI:** System control

**LUTRON:** Grafik Eye lighting system; Sivoia blinds

**BARRISOL:** Stretched PVC ceiling/screen wall

## POPPIN' BACK

Disney's reboot of *Mary Poppins* arrives on 4K Blu-ray p95

**ESSEX-BASED INSTALLER CLARKE** Infinity is responsible for this smart-looking attic-room home cinema conversion, now the pride and joy of a family with a passion for music and film. Described by the installers as a 'haven', it delivers largescreen 4K HDR visuals and immersive audio, with smart lighting, control and automated blinds the icing on the cake.

Design considerations were a key part of the brief – the owners demanded both comfort and aesthetic appeal – and the project hits the mark. The grey colour scheme is sympathetic to movie-watching, while wallpaper, stretched fabrics, floor-level LED lighting and a showpiece ceiling-based lighting installation bring wow-factor. Seating compromises a single row of four seats with drink holders, plus bean bag duo for general lounging around.

The focal point is the room's 3m-wide projection screen, which conceals the room's front speaker soundstage plus an adjustable bass trap system to fine-tune LF performance. The rest of the system's speakers (from Bowers & Wilkins) are installed discreetly in-wall/ceiling. A Sony VPL-VW320ES projector is mounted on the far wall in its own bespoke cabinet.

Of the end result, the owner is over the moon: '[Clarke Infinity] understood what we wanted and made it happen – our expectations have been surpassed.' ■

### A. Let there be dark

The attic features skylights that let in natural light, so for movie-watching Lutron Sivoia automated blinds were installed

### B. Under the eaves

The fixed-frame screen from Stewart Filmscreen measures three metres wide, and fits snugly under the room's sloping ceiling

### C. Tickled pink?

Smart lighting, delivered by Lutron Grafik Eye and DMX systems, adds a touch of glamour to this picture palace. Pre-programmed scenes are on-hand, depending on how the room is going to be used







**D. Four's company**

The large attic space enabled a quartet of seats to be arranged in a single row

**E. At a stretch**

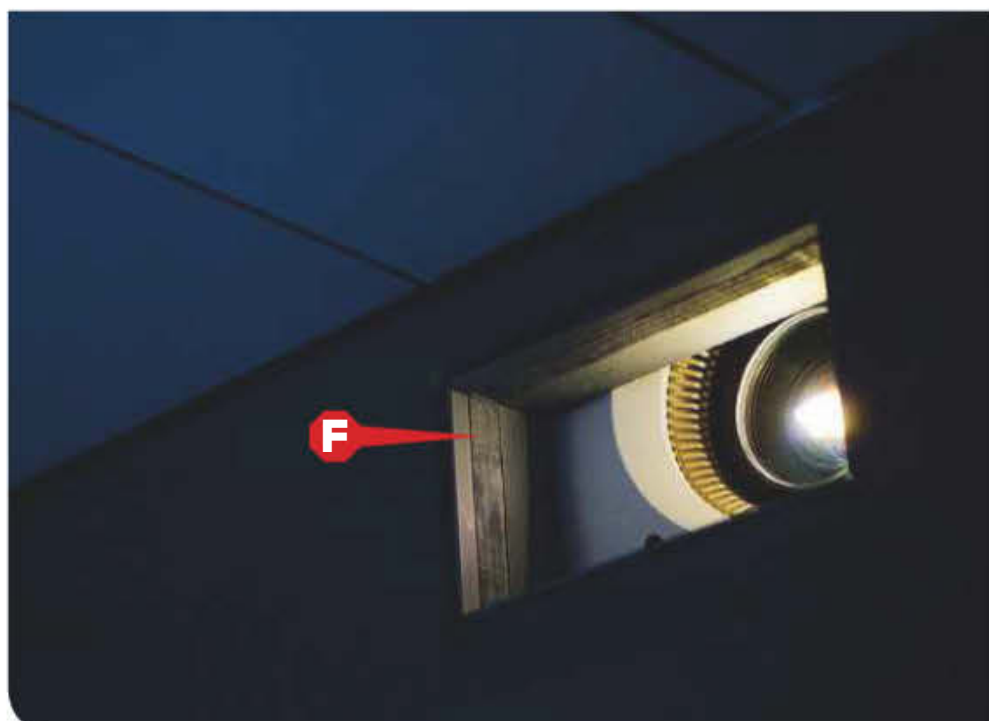
The Barrisol ceiling conceals speakers

**F. Behind the scenes**

Delivering Ultra HD images is a Sony VPL-VW320ES projector. To keep it out of sight the installers housed it in a bulkhead cabinet, which also helps to minimise sound leakage

**G. One remote to rule them all**

For system control, a programmable RTI handset was specified, enabling easy source selection, playback operation, and lighting/blinds integration. The room also has an in-wall lighting panel by the door







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# REVIEWS

→ **HARDWARE** SAMSUNG 65in Q90R 4K HDR QLED TV SVS 13in, 800W sealed home cinema subwoofer JVC DLA-N7B 4K premium projector HARMAN KARDON Enchant 800 soundbar with Multibeam Surround MONITOR AUDIO Compact MASS 5.1 sub/sat system OPTOMA UHD DLP projector with voice skills ROON Music integration software & MORE!

## Dressed up to the nines



Yamaha's nine-channel RX-A3080 AV receiver adds bespoke Surround: AI processing to a feature list that includes multiroom support, object audio decoding and 4K HDR handling. We put it to the test on p48.

### HCC RATINGS KEY...

Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★☆
Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★☆☆☆
Dire	★☆☆☆☆

All prices quoted are approximate and may have changed



**AV INFO****PRODUCT:**

A high-end 65in 4K TV using QLED technology

**POSITION:**

Flagship 4K TV in Samsung's 2019 range

**PEERS:**

LG OLED65C8; Sony KD-65ZF9, Philips 65OLED+903

**1. Samsung's premium TV comes with a premium-style zapper**

**2. The central stand shoulders the Q90R's 34kg bulk**

Samsung's new screen does things LCD TVs aren't supposed to do, says **John Archer**

# Bridging the tech divide?

When Samsung introduced its first QLED TVs in 2017, their focus was mainly on two things: brightness and colour range.

Two things which, funnily enough, rival OLED TV technology traditionally struggles with. But Samsung has moved on, and its 2019 QLED, tested here in the shape of the top-of-the-range QE65Q90R, is an LCD TV which behaves in many ways like an OLED TV – without sacrificing LCD's own strengths...

It doesn't look like an OLED, though. Samsung's direct LED lighting system makes this set much deeper around the back than typical, ultra-thin OLED TVs. That's not to say that the QE65Q90R doesn't have its own aesthetic charm. Its bezel is slim, it uses an external connections box that provides picture, sound and power to the screen by a single thin cable, and it boasts the Ambient Mode low-power 'screen saver' that lets you play anything from digital photos to famous artworks, funky lighting effects and cool optical illusion animations when you're not watching the TV. You can even display a photograph of your wall's paint or wallpaper on the screen for the ultimate blending-in effect.

Samsung has also tweaked the stand design from the one used with its 2018 Q9FN range, switching to an attractive metal sheet approach that lifts the TV slightly higher to make it easier to accommodate a soundbar underneath.

## A new angle

It's with its imaging features, however, that the QE65Q90R really makes its mark.

Particularly eye-catching is its new wide viewing angle technology. This allows you to watch this LCD TV from almost any angle without contrast or colour saturations wiping out. It does this by adding two layers to the LCD screen: one near the backlight that greatly reduces the loss of light focus and intensity that usually occurs at this stage, and one near the front that scatters the light emerging from the screen more equally in all directions.

Sony also achieved a measure of viewing angle success with its ZF9 LCD models. However, those sets had to sacrifice significant amounts of contrast to deliver their wide angle support.

Two other features of Samsung's 4K flagship are specifically focused on delivering a boost to black levels and retaining contrast. First, there's a new processing chip exclusively devoted to controlling the TV's 480-zone local dimming system. Second, the screen employs a new black filter that does a remarkable job of soaking up ambient light.

The main image processor is also more powerful than the one used by last year's Q9FN models, drawing on the 'AI' system Samsung developed for its 8K Q900R TVs.

This should mean, in particular, improved upscaling of sub-4K sources to the TV's native 4K screen.

Some may be surprised/disappointed that the QE65Q90R doesn't provide any full-bandwidth HDMI 2.1 ports. Yet this shouldn't pose a problem for the vast majority of users, as the TV still provides a couple of HDMI 2.1-related gaming features: Variable Refresh Rate support, and automatic game mode switching. The latter kicks the TV into its low-latency mode when game sources are detected, reducing the time the screen takes to render images to a measured 15.4ms.

There's another fresh game-related feature, dubbed Dynamic Black Equalizer. This lets you raise the light level of dark parts of the picture without disrupting the brightness or contrast elsewhere, so that you can, say, more easily spot enemies lurking in shadows.

Note, though, the TV doesn't currently feature eARC over HDMI, meaning it can't pass lossless multichannel audio streams onto a receiver/soundbar. Dolby Atmos via Dolby Digital+ does play out from the TV's Netflix app, however.

The QE65Q90R's other smart features are extensive. As expected, Samsung continues to





**MERA  
IMAGE**

*Aquaman* 4K gets  
a splash of colour  
from Amber  
Heard, p92

2

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3

offer all the most important UK catch-up TV apps, plus 4K HDR Netflix, YouTube and Amazon Prime Video support. There's also impressively effective voice control via Samsung's Bixby engine, and support for Alexa and Google Assistant via external devices. You'll also be able to use the Apple TV app and iTunes via an update later this year, as well as AirPlay 2 features.

### One giant leap?

The panel/processing refinements that Samsung has brought to the QE65Q90R deliver mostly astounding results that could at times be mistaken for OLED were it not for their extra, LCD-based brightness and colour punch.

The *First Man* 4K Blu-ray offers a stern test for any LCD TV thanks to its intensely bright shots of the moon and brightly reflective spacecraft appearing against the blackness of space. The QE65Q90R does a stunningly effective job throughout, delivering the film's extremes of darkness and light without one compromising the other. During the lunar landing sequence, the surface of the moon, the whiteness of the astronauts' suits, and the radiant ball of the sun appear blisteringly bright, while the black backdrop remains unsullied by general greyness or

localised backlight blooming. The only exception is some gentle blooming around stand-out bright objects that creeps in when you're watching from off-axis. This is one wide viewing-angle LCD issue that hasn't been fully fixed.

The sharpness of its native 4K pictures is exquisite. Highly detailed content, such as the non-CGI footage in the 4K Blu-ray of *Mortal Engines*, comes across rich in texture,

**'The sharpness of its 4K pictures is exquisite. Detailed content is rich in texture, depth and refinement'**

depth and refinement, and without any of the occasional shimmering or 'bitty' noise sometimes visible on previous 4K TV generations.

With good-quality HD sources, Samsung's revamped 4K upscaling engine is efficient, adding a sense of detail and image solidity without overcooking source noise, grain or hard edging. Yet the processing is arguably even more exceptional when it comes to lower-quality content.





Feed it a heavily compressed online stream, or standard-definition TV broadcast, and it focuses more on smoothing away blocking and mosquito noise than pushing sharpness. The result is far more watchable, immersive images than such sources frankly deserve.

The QE65Q90R's colour performance is beguiling, too. Capable of delivering a measured 2,050 nits on a 10 per cent white HDR window, it produces exceptionally bright, expanded saturations with the dazzling 4,000-nit master of *Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse*'s 4K Blu-ray. And the reduction in backlight blooming/leakage plays its part here.

You can generally enjoy more subtle but also punchy colours in very dark parts of the picture. I say 'generally' because a quirk of the new backlight control system can occasionally see small parts of the picture looking strangely faded. During the text that opens *Blade Runner 2049* on 4K Blu-ray the redness of the word 'Replicant' is almost completely faded out until the rest of the white text appears next to it. Or at least that's the case in the Standard picture mode that gives the best black levels and contrast. Switch to the Movie preset and the situation with the onscreen text improves, but only at the expense of greier black levels and much less vibrant colours.

There's more general shadow detail in the image's darkest areas in Movie mode than you get in Standard mode, unless you nudge brightness up. However, while the Movie preset is also supposed to provide a more 'accurate' image, my feeling is that most people will find the Standard mode overall more pleasing – and certainly a better example of the screen's full capabilities.

### Minus HDR+

Standard dynamic range pictures are markedly darker than those of last year's Q9FN models. I'm not sure why Samsung has gone this way, although it's notable that the QE65Q90R's images are more reflective of SDR's low native mastering brightness values than they were on the 2018 sets. It's a shame there isn't more flexibility for increasing SDR brightness if you want to. Samsung has also unexpectedly removed its confusingly named 'HDR+' system for converting SDR into HDR.



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### SPECIFICATIONS

**3D:** No **4K:** Yes. 3,840 x 2,160 **HDR:** Yes. HDR10; HLG; HDR10+ **TUNER:** Yes. Freeview HD; satellite HD **CONNECTIONS:** 4 x HDMI inputs; 3 x USB; RF input; Ethernet; optical digital audio output **SOUND (CLAIMED):** 60W **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** 2,000 nits **CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** N/A **DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 1,450.1(w) x 831.2(h) x 399(d)mm **WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** 34.7kg

**FEATURES:** Built-in Wi-Fi; Bluetooth; USB multimedia playback; dedicated backlight chip; 4K AI processing; Quantum Dot screen technology; Bixby voice control built in; Alexa and Google Assistant compatible; Apple TV app and Airplay 2 support via future firmware; wide viewing angle technology; Ambient Mode; Auto Game Mode; Freesync VRR

### PARTNER WITH



**SAMSUNG HW-Q70R:** £700 gets you this mid-range 'Cinematic Soundbar' system (with wireless subwoofer and Acoustic Beam dispersion tech). It incorporates upfiring drivers to complement onboard Dolby Atmos/DTS:X decoding.

The QE65Q90R isn't compatible with Dolby Vision dynamic HDR. It does, however, handle the rival HDR10+ format, which works on a broadly similar basis – at least in the sense that it adds extra scene-by-scene data to a basic HDR10 master. However, while 20th Century Fox and IMAX now offer HDR10+ on a small number of 4K Blu-rays, and Amazon Prime Video now uses HDR10+ on its HDR streams, there remain far more sources available in Dolby Vision.

The TV's default settings cause a few issues.

The Eco mode, which is on by default in the Standard setting, causes the picture to become too dark for blackout viewing, so be sure to turn it off. Also, neither the Auto Motion or Digital Clean View noise reduction processors are quite as adept at adapting to different scenarios as they might be, requiring some manual intervention for the best results.

### Raising the bar

Overall, the visuals here are ground-breakingly good, setting a standard for LCD TVs that should give even the most die-hard OLED fans pause for thought, and

the onboard audio system is strong too; the speakers have enough power to create a fairly wide soundstage, with noticeable effects placement.

At £3,800, the QE65Q90R is undoubtedly expensive for a 65in TV, and it may be that the step-down Q85R series hits a better price/performance mark. But even with that caveat, there's no denying its appeal and Samsung's refined approach to LCD deserves the highest praise ■

**3. The TV's direct LED backlight engine uses 480-zone dimming**

**4. Samsung's external connections box includes HDMI, USB and tuner inputs**

### HCC VERDICT



#### Samsung QE65Q90R

→ £3,800 → [www.samsung.co.uk](http://www.samsung.co.uk)

**WE SAY:** This high-spec TV sets out to improve on previous QLED generations and succeeds – viewing angle, upscaling and black level all get a boost. An excellent 4K HDR performer.



1

Optoma's 4K HDR hero gets a voice control update, but is it a smart move wonders **Steve May?**

# Dawn of the 4K smart projector

All but identical save for the provision of Wi-Fi and smart home functionality, the UHD51A is the brainier brother of Optoma's UHD51 released last year. You no longer have to wield a remote to power up, select inputs or fiddle with modes – you can use voice instead... provided you have the patience to make it all work.

In addition to the Amazon Alexa support spotted on rival models, Optoma has introduced Google Home integration and even IFTTT (If This Then That) functionality. So is this 4K HDR projector something to shout about?

## Ins and outs

Gloss black, with a silver trim, the UHD51A is reasonably compact and nicely finished, and at 5.22kg it's suitable for both shelf- or ceiling-mounting. Its back-panel





connections are comprehensive, and include two 4K-ready HDMI 2.0 inputs, plus a PC VGA port, audio minijack input/output and optical digital audio output. There are twin USB media ports too (the media player is quite versatile, handling MKV and MPEG video files) and one of these can be used to power an HDMI dongle. A third USB is provided for a Wi-Fi dongle (wireless support isn't built in). There's also Ethernet, plus RS-232 for system control and a 12V trigger to sync with screen and AV receiver.

As you might expect for this category of projector, there's also a basic 2 x 5W sound system onboard, which is useful if you're not opting for a permanent install.

The UHD51A is fun to drive. It sports a snazzy, graphical interface with coloured tiles that's more intuitive than the familiar projector-menu text box. The experience is not unlike using a TV.

The supplied remote control also makes a play at streamlining operation, although it's not backlit, which is a disappointment. Unlike more typical PJ remotes, this has a simple thumbwheel design, augmented with a few keys, including Home, Back and volume control. This selection

is mimicked on top of the projector, should it be more convenient to use on-body controls.

Physical setup is straightforward, with an internal test pattern generator on hand to sharpen everything up, and a moderate degree of vertical lens shift (+10 per cent) to align with your screen. Given the relatively low asking price of the UHD51A, you shouldn't be surprised to find that the focus and zoom controls are manual. A 1.3x zoom combines with the lens arrangement to deliver a throw ratio of 1.2-1.59:1.

Optoma may have bigscreen projection down pat, but network functionality is as slick as gravel. To activate the projector's smart skillset, you'll need to register and pair it on Optoma's Device Cloud database. You can then enable the Amazon Alexa skill 'Optoma SmartProjection for Smart Home', or convince your Google Home to link with the product. The user experience here is horrible, requiring you to jump between apps, with Optoma as an intermediary.

## 'In addition to Amazon Alexa support, Optoma has introduced Google Home integration and even IFTTT'

Alexa voice control is limited to power, input, volume and USB media player control. Google Home control allows you to dig a little deeper, such as selecting display modes and activating the UHD51A's image interpolation. IFTTT is a little different, in that it allows more seamless integration through the use of applets. You could use a cinematic Philips Hue lighting scene to trigger the projector powering up, for example. That said, you'd need to be a serious smart home geek to want to master IFTTT protocols.

### Welcome Discovery

The dubious value of smart functionality aside, the UHD51A's image quality immediately gets a thumbs up. With both HD and UHD sources, there're admirable levels of detail on screen. For sheer eye-candy thrills, *Star Trek: Discovery* (Netflix, HD HDR) allows this Optoma to shine, finding cinematic beauty in its showcase VFX. Meanwhile, the outlandish *Warcraft* (Sky Cinema UHD) looks supremely naturalistic. Orcs really are quite fetching in 2160p.

Brightness is rated at 2,400 Lumens, with a 500,000:1 dynamic contrast ratio. In the real world, this equates to the UHD51A being bright enough for use in rooms with some ambient light.

The projector is at its quietest with the lamp brightness in Eco mode. This robs images of peak white snap, but isn't too high a price to be paid in a dark-room environment. Operating noise is quite high, though. While Optoma claims 25dB in Eco mode, the spinning DLP colour wheel has a distinct sound signature.

Lamp life is rated between 4,000 and 15,000 hours, depending on the light mode chosen.

The projector is HDR compatible, and actually makes a good fist of high dynamic range content (given that consumer projectors really can't produce spectral highlights like a TV can). The best you can hope for from any HDR projector is appreciable punch, and this model

### AV INFO

**PRODUCT:**  
Smart 4K DLP projector

**POSITION:**  
Middle of Optoma's PJ range, below UHD65 and UHZ65 (laser) models

**PEERS:**  
BenQ W2700;  
Acer V6820i

**1. The projector's throw ratio of 1.2-1.59:1 is suited to small/medium rooms**

**2. A tidy remote, but not backlit**





has a fair stab. However, with some programmes the image can look overly dark.

When fed SDR content, there are a variety of image presets to choose from: Cinema, HDR Sim, Game, Reference, Bright and User. Cinema proves to be the most satisfying and well-balanced.

Image lag is rated at 70ms in Game mode. You'll probably think this fine for general gaming, but not so much competitive fragging. It's actually less impressive

'The outlandish *Warcraft* looks supremely naturalistic on this PJ. Orcs really are quite fetching in 2160p'

than the more affordable UHD40 in this regard, but that's presumably down to the PureMotion image processing adding unwanted latency.

**Ready to REC.709**

The UHD51A uses a six-segment RGBRGB colour wheel that covers a claimed 100 per cent of the REC.709 colour space found on SDR Blu-ray, although DCI-P3 coverage falls short. Subjective vibrancy is high, however; bright primaries have a convincing level of saturation, courtesy of TI Brilliant Color processing.

A single-chip DLP device, Optoma's beamer is built around Texas Instruments' XPR (eXpanded Pixel Resolution) 0.47in DMD device, which uses clever image switching to deliver an 8-million pixel image to the screen. It's not native 4K, but you'll be hard-pressed to tell. Certainly, with native 4K content, image quality is demonstrably sharper than Full HD.

As with the UHD51 [see *HCC* #287], I wasn't aware of DLP rainbow flicker, something worth noting if that image artefact has bothered you in the past.

A bonus for home cinephiles is the projector's 3D capability, and it impresses with stereoscopic material. As Ridley Scott's *Prometheus* (3D Blu-ray) opens, we're literally flying along the planet's surface. When we land at the thunderous waterfall, it appears to go back at least a mile; there's genuine spatial dimensionality to the image. 3D pictures are presented at 1080p.

Black level performance is fine for the price point, as is the model's overall contrast. If you want to enhance blacks, there's a Dynamic Black mode to experiment with, but while this improves image dynamics, it does crush shadow detail.

**SPECIFICATIONS**

**3D:** Yes. Active 3D (glasses optional) **4K:** Yes. 3,840 x 2,160 **HDR:** Yes. HDR10 **CONNECTIONS:** 2 x HDMI v2.0 inputs; PC VGA input; audio minijack input/output; optical digital audio output; 4 x USB ports (one powered, one service port); Ethernet; 12V trigger; RS-232C **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** 2,400 Lumens **CONTRAST (CLAIMED):** 500,000:1 **ZOOM:** 1.3x **DIMENSIONS:** 392(w) x 281(h) x 118(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 5.22kg

**FEATURES:** XPR single-chip DLP design; Amazon Alexa support; Google Home support; IFTTT support; 2 x 5W built-in audio; claimed lamp-life of 4000 hours (Bright mode), 10,000 (Eco), 15,000 (Dynamic); claimed 25dB fan noise in Eco mode; 1.21:1-1.59:1 throw ratio; vertical lens shift

**PARTNER WITH**



**OPTOMA DE-9106ETT:** Optoma's tab-tensioned electric 16:9 screen measures 106in diagonal and uses a matte white fabric designed for 4K projectors. Use the UHD51A's 12V trigger output (or one on an AVR) to kick the drop-down motor into life.

**Topical update**

It's easy to be impressed by Optoma's UHD51A. It's a well built, high-performance 4K projector, bolstered by topical smart home functionality. Image quality is generally great, and its 3D performance entertaining.

The provision of voice control, however, is a mixed blessing. If your smart assistant of choice is Amazon Alexa, then there's little here in terms of functionality which warrants the time spent setting the system up, or the price hike over the original UHD51. Google Home users are at least offered a most comprehensive range of control options, but actually using them still seems more gimmick than godsend. The IFTTT functionality potentially has the most to offer, but this is more likely to be programmed by an AV professional as part of a larger integrated system install.

Overall, this is an intriguing update on a fine projector, but ultimately perhaps little more than a stopgap until the next wave of TI 4K DLP chips enter production ■

**3. USB ports handle media file playback, Wi-Fi dongle support, and device power**

**HCC VERDICT**

★★★★★

**Optoma UHD51A**  
→ £1,700 → [www.optoma.co.uk](http://www.optoma.co.uk)

**WE SAY:** We're not convinced smart voice control adds very much to the home cinema projection experience, but the UHD51A impresses where it counts – and that's onscreen.







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Model Shown: E8





#### AV INFO

**PRODUCT:**  
Nine-channel  
Dolby Atmos/DTS:X  
AV receiver

**POSITION:**  
Flagship in  
Yamaha's  
Aventage range

**PEERS:**  
Pioneer SC-LX901;  
Denon AVC-X6500H



Yamaha aims to impress **Steve May** with its home cinema AVR flagship

# The sound of AI AV

The RX-A3080 is Yamaha's smartest AVENTAGE AV receiver. Elegantly finished, and boasting AI (artificial intelligence) audio post-processing, it lords it over a quartet of stablemates (the RX-A680, RX-A880, RX-A1080 and RX-A2080), and is a direct replacement for last season's RX-A3070. As a flagship model, you'd expect it to leave no stone unturned. But...

The RX-A3080 is 'merely' a nine-channel design. This means that a Dolby Atmos configuration would typically be limited to 5.2.4 or 7.2.2. Or, alternatively, you could opt to run a flatbed 7.2 layout, with additional stereo amplification to a second room.

While the receiver can handle processing for eleven channels (7.2.4), you'll need to stump up for (and wire up) additional amplification. This compares poorly to both Denon and Pioneer, which tout 11-channel models at the same lofty price point as this Yamaha. It's hard not to feel a little short-changed.

## Triple HDMI

The rest of the specification is solid, however. Connectivity is decent, and with an eye to the US market, there's big support for multizone use.

Compatible with Dolby Vision and HLG, the receiver offers seven HDMI inputs, all of which are HDCP 2.2/4K 60p 4:4:4 compatible. These link to a trio of HDMI outputs; two can run a TV (via ARC) and projector in a single cinema room, leaving the third for multizone use, alongside analogue stereo for Zones 2 and 3. (There's no indication that the receiver supports e-ARC, by the way – although that's not to say it couldn't be added by firmware).

There are then six digital audio inputs (three coaxial, three optical), plus AV and component inputs for legacy gear. There's also a pair of XLR inputs. Not particularly common in home theatre, these might be used, for example, with Yamaha's own CDS2100 SACD player for audiophile two-channel playback. Completing the picture is a full set of channel pre-outs, again with an XLR stereo output. System control options include RS-232C, IR remote and two 12V triggers.

Other niceties include a DAB FM tuner, and dual-band Wi-Fi (twin aerials rotate up on the rear) supported by

**1.** On the AVR's underside, a central fifth foot aims to minimise vibration

**2.** Yamaha's new backlit remote still has plenty of buttons, but they now come in soft-touch rubber



2





3

Ethernet. For vinyl aficionados there's a phono preamp (MM) onboard.

When it comes to styling the RX-A3080 looks the business, albeit not in any way different from its antecedents. The aluminium fascia is clean and classy, with input and volume knobs sandwiching a drawbridge of front-facing controls. Rather annoyingly, Yamaha has binned the forward HDMI input, but you do get a USB port, YPAO mic input for room EQ, and a pair of stereo phono inputs. There's also a full-sized headphone jack.

Wireless support covers Bluetooth and Apple Airplay, with voice control courtesy of an Amazon Alexa skill.

Naturally, the RX-A3080 is MusicCast compatible, capable of streaming files up to 24-bit/192kHz to other MusicCast components. MusicCast 20 or 50 speakers can

**'The RX-A3080 is no shrinking violet. It's dynamic and dramatic, bolstered by forward-thinking processing'**

also be used as wireless surrounds, however these were not supplied for audition – and I'm not sure such a setup is the aim of someone spending up to £2,000 on a receiver.

The AVR's internal design uses a classic H-shape for reinforcement, and Yamaha's long-standing Anti Resonance Technology (ART) wedge foot, located centrally, to minimise vibration. Given that the RX-A3080 weighs the best part of 19kg, I wouldn't expect too much rattle or roll.

Unlike Denon and Marantz, Yamaha doesn't offer much of a hand when it comes to setup. It's down to you to basically figure things out. Attaching the YPAO mic automatically triggers the EQ routine, but before that you need to assign channels to match your speaker layout. And the room EQ will almost certainly require some post-calibration assessment, not least because in my experience it seemed to indiscriminately assign all speakers as 'Large.'

That said, you don't actually need to rely on YPAO for setup. You can manually configure your layout, choose your preferred crossover, then apply YPAO parametric EQ (Flat, Front, Natural), or stay *au naturel*. I found setting speaker size and crossover frequency myself ('Small' and 80Hz) brought significant benefits in depth and slam.

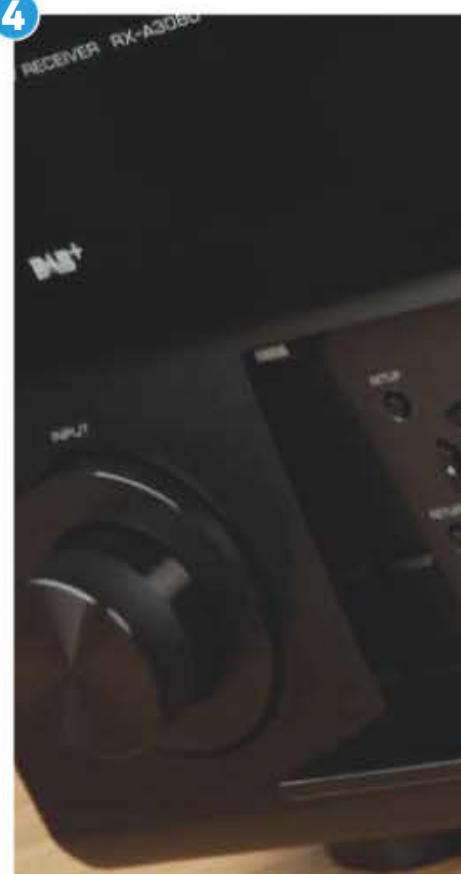
Different configurations can be assigned to one of two Patterns. These might be a combination of YPAO EQ and manual alternative, with different speaker sizes and crossovers between them, or complimentary patterns for multichannel and stereo listening.

A refreshed, high-resolution user interface deserves a ripple of applause. That familiar Yammy piano graphic is finally rendered in HD! More coherent than what we've seen in the past, the UI is no longer a collection of disparate pop-up boxes. Consequently, it's a lot easier to find things like lip-sync adjustment and bass boost.

### **Making a Spectacle**

As you'd assume, there's decoding support for Dolby Atmos, DTS:X and their various subsets. The receiver can serve these up with Cinema DSP HD3 post-processing, if you want to optimise audio with DSP tricks such as Spectacle, Sci-Fi, Action and Sports. However, with the

4





introduction of Surround: AI, you may no longer feel tempted to wrestle with individual sonic modes. Why bother when the AVR will analyse and optimise audio processing automatically?

Toggled on or off from a button on the remote, Surround: AI analyses content based on specific sonic elements, such as dialogue, sound effects and music, in real time. One consequence of this is that the effect of Surround AI is rather difficult to predict.

More on that later. I'll first say the RX-A3080 is characterised by a bold, dynamic character, especially after manual intervention post-EQ.

It has a clear, nimble sound, and what really impresses is the sheer spatial scale of its presentation. The front soundstage in particular is astoundingly detailed and expansive (an ESS Sabre ES9026PRO Ultra DAC handles the main seven channels and does a stonking job); so much so that watching *Mission: Impossible – Rogue Nation* (Blu-ray, Dolby Atmos) seemed to make my 65in display almost double in size.

The pre-credit stunt ('I'm not in the plane... I'm on the plane!'), with Tom Cruise hanging from the side of an Airbus, swamps the room with engine roar, before Lalo Schiffrin's theme kicks in. It's a glorious cinematic cacophony, but the Yamaha keeps every layer coherent. The subsequent dialogue in the record store is full-bodied and resonant.

The receiver has a flair for the melodramatic. The slamming of the cars, before the brutal rain-soaked fight in *John Wick* (Blu-ray, Dolby Atmos) is unrepentantly visceral, and the deluge of rain so convincing it had me mopping up puddles.

Switch to a standard 5.1 source and the RX-A3080 proves adept at spreading the mix around the entire soundstage. When the misfit kids select their characters in *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle* (Sky Cinema), the ominous jungle drums expand and engulf like a hungry hippo. Crackles of energy arc front to back, shortly before the kids are sucked into the game. The re-mix gave me goosebumps.

Yamaha's DSP expertise is unrivalled, although as always, it can prove a little divisive, and the sheer wealth of sound programs baffling. *The Walking Dead* (Fox, 5.1)

SPECIFICATIONS

**DOLBY ATMOS:** Yes **DTS:X:** Yes **THX:** No **MULTICHANNEL INPUT:** No **MULTICHANNEL PRE-OUT:** Yes. 11.2-channel **MULTICHANNEL OUTPUT (CLAIMED):** 9 x 150W (into 8 ohm, 20Hz-20kHz, 0.06% THD) **MULTIROOM:** Yes. Zone 2 (HDMI/analogue stereo) and Zone 3 (analogue stereo) **AV INPUTS:** 4 x composite; 6 x digital audio (3 x optical and 3 x coaxial) **HDMI:** Yes. 7 x inputs; 3 x outputs **VIDEO UPSCALING:** Yes. To 2160p **COMPONENT VIDEO:** Yes. 2 inputs **DIMENSIONS:** 435(w) x 474(d) x 192(h)mm **WEIGHT:** 19.6kg

**FEATURES:** YPAO -R.S.C. Room EQ; vinyl player phono stage; AirPlay; Amazon Alexa support; MusicCast multiroom compatible; stereo XLR input/pre-out; Cinema DSP HD3; DSD (2.8/5.6MHz), FLAC, WAV, ALAC hi-res media playback; Ethernet; Wi-Fi; USB; dual subwoofer outputs; Surround: AI post-processing

PARTNER WITH



**KEF Q SERIES:** This range may be entry-level for KEF, but its performance is far from it. The series offers floorstanders, standmount and centre channel models, and – for home cinema system builders – Atmos upfiring units.

sounds more cinematic and less mumbly with the Adventure DSP switched on. But constantly choosing the 'right' DSP mode for content can get tiresome.

As a clever catch-all enhancement, Surround: AI intrigues me. When Dwayne Johnson and troupe first land in the jungle, the ambiance is beautifully painted. Surround: AI switched on, the jungle seems somehow larger. When Jack Black respawns, every corner of the room rings, before he crashes back to Earth with a satisfying LFE thump. But with AI off, the presentation is undoubtedly cleaner. The Jumanji drums sound tighter, with better focus. But I missed the heightened sense of immersion the AI mode brings.

The process actually has a more profound effect on music than it does on movies. A 96kHz/24-bit PCM 5.1 mix of Rush's *2112*, particularly the spiralling riff from *Passage to Bangkok*, becomes intoxicating. The slight reverb it imparts to music doesn't work for all tunes, but it's entertaining.

- 3. The RX-A3080 offers a third HDMI output for Zone 2
- 4. The front flap conceals controls, plus headphone, analogue audio and USB ports

A choice to make

When it comes to theatrics, the RX-A3080 is no shrinking violet. It's dynamic and dramatic, bolstered by forward-thinking audio processing. Movies and music are handled with high-resolution ease, and I rate Surround: AI as a refreshing addition to Yamaha's DSP toolbox.

There are caveats though. Usability isn't on a par with main rivals, and with only nine channels of amplification it's under-specified for the price. If you only need a nine-channel AVR, Yamaha's own RX-A2080 could well be a more sensible buy, unless you really want XLR connectivity.

That said, for those who've grown up with Yamaha home cinema, and Cinema DSP in particular, the RX-A3080 is a tempting high-end update on a tried-and-tested design ■

HCC VERDICT



**Yamaha RX-A3080**  
→ £2,000 → [uk.yamaha.com](http://uk.yamaha.com)

**WE SAY:** Yamaha mixes popcorn with AI to create a bold, theatrical home cinema receiver, but – like multiplex pick 'n' mix – it feels a little expensive for a nine-channel model.





Can a discreet 5.1 system deliver sonic goods without causing domestic strife? **Steve Withers** finds out

# MASS effect for your living room





High-end speaker systems catch the eye and ear, but the reality is not everyone has a large enough lounge, let alone a dedicated room, in which to fit a system composed of floorstanders and multiple standmount speakers. Compromise can be the name of the game.

Such a compromise often comes in the form of a smaller subwoofer and satellite system, to provide a discreet solution. That's clearly what UK manufacturer Monitor Audio thought when launching its MASS system back in 2013. The company leveraged off its experience making larger speakers to deliver a more lifestyle-friendly alternative. MASS has now been updated, and it's been given more than just a lick of paint.

### Midnight MASS

The new system will set you back £600 and the

finish that should easily blend with the furnishings in your living room. There's a choice of two colours: 'Midnight' (black/blue) and 'Mist' (white/grey). Either choice should prove lifestyle-friendly.

The MASS Satellite speakers' revised sealed cabinets have been tuned, we're told, for wider dispersion and better integration with the MASS Subwoofer, aided by improved rigidity thanks to internal bracing.

The Satellite is a two-way design, with a 3.5in MMP II (Metal Matrix Polymer) midbass driver, and a 0.75in soft dome tweeter. The midbass driver is situated at the top, with the high-frequency unit below and just to the left. Overall, the new Satellite reminds >

MASS Satellite bookshelf speakers look very different from the older versions, although that's probably a good thing. The previous design, with its stridently angular cabinets, was an acquired taste. This new generation is softer on the eye, and boasts a stylish custom-weave cloth

### AV INFO

**PRODUCT:**  
Affordable 5.1 sub/sat package

**POSITION:**  
Below Apex and Radius in Monitor Audio's range

**PEERS:**  
Wharfedale DX-2; Q Acoustics 3010i



**1.** The previous MASS centre speaker laid horizontally on a cradle stand – now all five install vertically



me of a smaller and less industrial-looking version of JBL's iconic Control One.

The specifications are what you'd expect given the diminutive cabinet, and while not the most sensitive of speakers at 80dB, the Satellite has a nominal impedance of 8 Ohms which should be easy to drive

**'The MASS system also manages to pull off the sub/sat combo trick: it sounds bigger than it looks'**

with a decent budget AV receiver. The claimed frequency response is 105Hz-34kHz, so best set the crossovers on your receiver to 120Hz (or above) and let the subwoofer do all the heavy lifting.

### Easier installation

The speakers' binding posts are now at the bottom facing rearwards, rather than on the underside facing downwards. They're hidden behind a removable panel that helps keep things tidy, and while general installation is probably easier, it does mean that one of Monitor Audio's innovative pieces of thinking has been lost.

The old stands had 4mm plugs at the top, which allowed you to attach the speakers and then connect cabling to binding posts at the bottom. The new MASS Stands (£100 a pair) come in a choice of black or white and attach using the mounting-point at the rear of the speaker. You then run the cabling up through the stand, before connecting to the speaker's binding posts.

The mounting-point is dual purpose and can be used with the Stands, or the optional MASM Mount wall bracket (£18 each) which comes in black, white or silver finishes. In the previous MASS system the centre speaker was mounted on its side, but the new Satellites are all identical, meaning they can be mounted in the same orientation for better tonal balance.

The basic MASS system is 5.1 but if you fancy expanding that to a more immersive 7.1-channel configuration, there is the option to buy the Satellites individually at a cost of £75 each.

2



You can't have a sub/sat system without the sub, and the new MASS Subwoofer sports the same eye-catching custom-weave cloth finish and colour choices as the Satellites. Its sealed cabinet is made from MDF with an 18mm base and internal bracing. An 8in MMP II woofer is combined with a 2in long-throw voice coil, and powered by 120W of built-in Class D grunt.

The Subwoofer is rated down to around 34Hz (-3dB), and more importantly it goes up to 150Hz, which allows for an effective crossover with the passive speaker. In terms of sheer grunt the new sub has been slightly downgraded compared to the previous model, which used a 10in driver backed by 220W of amplification.

At the rear is a fairly typical set of controls for volume, phase and crossover. There are also three bass EQ settings: Impact, Music and Movie. In terms of connections there's a choice of stereo phono and LFE phono inputs, along with a 12V trigger and auto-standby feature.

Monitor Audio's MASS 5.1 system is very easy to set up, and all you really need to do is add some speaker cable to

3



4





your shopping basket and decide whether to stand-, wall-, or shelf-mount the Satellites (little rubber blisters are provided for the latter). The design of the speakers allows them to be installed without drawing attention to themselves, and the sub is compact enough to be easily hidden away.

## Wide and detailed

Monitor Audio has ditched the C-CAM drivers that graced the previous MASS system, but the new Satellites are able to deliver an equally lively sound. I didn't need to push these speakers too hard to get an impressively wide and detailed soundstage, which is important, because a living room-friendly system like this is unlikely to be driven at unsociable levels.

The new speakers manage to avoid brightness, but at the same time deliver an exciting sonic signature. The system certainly had my Spidey-senses tingling as I watched the 4K platter of *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*, which boasts a dynamic soundtrack (Dolby Atmos/TrueHD) that makes riotous use of the surround channels.

It's a stylised audio mix that often emphasises even the simplest scene with over-the-top sound effects. The climax sees numerous Spider-People battling a rogue's gallery of villains and here the MASS system really steps up to the surround plate. As characters swoop around the room and webs shoot everywhere, this six-pack system creates a sense of space that's addictive. The identical nature of the five satellites results in excellent tonal balance, with one speaker handing over to the next in a seamless fashion.

Within all this frenetic comic book mayhem, there's clarity in spades. The detail of the overall performance translates into a believable aural presence, whether with dialogue from the centre channel or surround effects. The MASS system also manages to pull off the key trick that any sub/sat combo must achieve: it sounds bigger than it looks. This ability to produce a big and open soundfield while remaining discreet is arguably its *raison d'être*.

Perhaps the only sign of weakness rears its head as the Kingpin enters the fray, and the system fails to fully convey the sheer scale of Spider-Man's heavyweight arch-enemy. Compared to the previous incarnation, this sleeker new system has a performance that's more nuanced but loses some impact.

I moved on to the UHD Blu-ray of *Mary Poppins Returns* to gauge how the MASS 5.1 handled music as well as filmic effects. The results continued to impress, with the LCR speakers creating a realistic front soundstage. The songs in the film may not be memorable, but the system does a commendable job of conveying the precise instrumentation and enthusiastic vocals.

Once again the satellites deliver a balanced presence, rendering the soundtrack with assurance and skill. The MASS subwoofer also plays its part in support, generating efficient lower frequencies up to the crossover point. However, the sound of Admiral Boom's cannon lacked the ballistic slam that I was hoping for.

## SPECIFICATIONS

### MASS Satellites

**DRIVE UNITS:** 1 x 0.75in soft dome tweeter; 1 x 3.5in MMP II midbass driver  
**ENCLOSURE:** Sealed **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 105Hz-34kHz  
**SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 80dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 70W  
**DIMENSIONS:** 122(w) x 147(h) x 107(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 1.12kg

### MASS Subwoofer

**DRIVE UNITS:** 1 x 8in MMP II woofer **ENCLOSURE:** Front-firing, sealed **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 34Hz-150Hz **ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 120W  
**REMOTE CONTROL:** No **DIMENSIONS:** 320(w) x 359(h) x 350(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 10.2kg  
**FEATURES:** Stereo phono input; LFE input; 0-180 degrees phase switch; crossover control; volume control; Impact, Movie and Music EQ settings; automatic standby option; 12V trigger

## PARTNER WITH



**SPIDER-MAN: INTO THE SPIDER-VERSE:** Sony Pictures' animation gets a triumphant Ultra HD Blu-ray release. Visuals are breathtaking, and the Atmos soundmix a skilful blend of intense action and scene-setting ambience. See p90 for more.



Wartime zombie caper *Overlord* (Ultra HD Blu-ray) is a bass beast, so I used the opening parachute drop to test the various EQ settings on the sub. As the name suggests, Music (which Monitor Audio says deepens output to 30Hz but at the expense of 2dB) is probably best reserved for listening to music, but the Movie mode, which targets a flat response, did a decent job of delivering the percussive impact of the exploding ordinance, while allowing the satellite speakers to render the highly directional soundstage in visceral detail.

Personally, I think the Impact option is too boomy, robbing the entire system of balance, but your opinion may differ.

## Highly effective

So that film didn't have the same chest-thumping sense of scale as when heard on a larger system, but in fairness it would be unrealistic to expect a sub/sat system at this level to deliver the kind of performance experienced from a setup composed of full-size cabinets. That's the price you pay for something that can retain domestic bliss. And considering the limited amount of real estate this sub/sat combo takes up, it can still engineer an impressively big and open soundstage, with a nuanced yet energetic performance. As long as you're not expecting the kind of tectonic low-frequencies that can damage your foundations, the MASS 5.1 system is easy to live with and highly effective ■

## HCC VERDICT



### Monitor Audio MASS 5.1

→ £600 → [www.monitoraudio.com](http://www.monitoraudio.com)

**WE SAY:** This discreet and affordable 5.1 surround sound system isn't a bass monster but blends sweetly with your furnishings while still making its presence felt.

**2. For LFE, the system uses an 8in sub with 120W amplifier**

**3. Monitor Audio's Midnight finish is a refreshing alternative to the typical black**

**4. The sub has a flip switch to select Music, Movie or Impact mode**

**5. Each satellite partners a soft dome tweeter with 3.5in midbass driver**





JVC extends its lineup of native 4K projectors in the shape of the DLA-N7B. **Steve Withers** investigates

# Going native

It's taken a while – a surprisingly long while, actually – but JVC has finally embraced native 4K projection. Yes, I know the company released the DLA-Z1 laser projector two years ago and that was a genuine 4K device, but it was also thirty-five grand and the size of a hatchback. So, unless you're Jeff Bezos, it was hardly affordable.

The DLA-N7B is part of a new range and sports the same native 4K D-ILA device first introduced on the DLA-Z1. While not exactly cheap – £8,500 is hardly spare change – it does bring native 4K projection down to a level that's more in line with a home cinema fan's budget.

If the DLA-N7B's price is liable to bust your wallet there's also the DLA-N5, although I hesitate to call that model 'entry-level' at £6,500. The DLA-N7B boasts a wider colour gamut and slightly more Lumens, but whether that justifies the price difference is debatable.





matte black, making the 'B' at the end of its model number rather redundant. At the rear you'll find all the connections, along with air intake vents and some basic controls.

The remote has had a makeover, and the new zapper is smaller and more comfortable to hold. The button layout is sensible with all the controls you'll need, including a backlight. When pressed the text on each key illuminates, making them easy to read in a darkened room.

The connections are composed of two HDMI inputs (supporting 18Gbps 4K HDR transmission up to 60fps), an RS-232 serial connector, an Ethernet port, and a 12V trigger. There's also a USB port for firmware updates, and a mini DIN 3-pin connector for the optional 3D synchro emitter.

You can place the projector on a stand or ceiling-mount it using a bracket. The DLA-N7B is primarily designed for medium and large home cinemas, and includes a 2x zoom.

Installation is a doddle thanks to motorised focus, zoom and very generous shift controls. You simply use the remote to align and sharpen the image. The controls are precise.

**'Any doubts about the benefits of native 4K are dispelled when watching even a regular Blu-ray'**

The lens control memory is now included in an installation sub-menu along with features such as pixel adjustment and masking. Users can create up to nine settings for various screen aspect ratios and content.

The Natural picture mode will get you closest to the industry standards. For movies leave the CMD (frame interpolation) feature off, but it can be effective with sport.

When the projector receives an HDR signal it automatically selects the correct picture mode. However, you might want to select the 6500K colour temperature and BT.2020 colour space to ensure optimal performance. Engaging the dynamic iris can also prove beneficial.

The new Auto Tone Mapping feature includes a slider that adjusts the overall brightness for larger screens, with the default zero setting based on 100in. However, this feature isn't always able to read the metadata, so there are times when you may have to do a bit of manual tweaking.

The DLA-N7B is whisper quiet in operation, with a 20dB measurement in low lamp. In part this may be due to the larger chassis allowing for better cooling, but you also don't have the annoying sound of the e-shift device whizzing backwards and forwards within the lens assembly.

## JVC awakens

Any doubts about the benefits of native 4K projection are quickly dispelled when watching even a regular Blu-ray. A top-notch transfer like *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* looks stunning, with an image that revels in rich, natural colours and a contrast performance that really pops.

During the Millennium Falcon's visceral chase through the crashed star destroyers on Jakku, JVC's upscaling renders all the detail in the twisted hulks despite the frenetic motion.

The PJ delivers marvellous blacks as Rey flies through the superstructure of one of the wrecked ships. The black level performance isn't quite as impressive as the previous DLA-X7900B, which had a higher claimed native contrast, but the DLA-N7B is still superior to Sony's 4K projectors. ➤

## AV INFO

**PRODUCT:**  
4K HDR D-ILA home cinema projector

**POSITION:**  
Mid-point in JVC's range between DLA-N5 and DLA-NX9

**PEERS:**  
Sony VPL-VW570ES;  
Epson EH-TW9400

**1.** The N7B uses a new, larger chassis design over the previous DLA-X7900

**2.** The remote has also been revised to be more compact and less cluttered



So what do you get for your hard-earned readies? Aside from the increase in native resolution, the features are largely the same as previous models, including a low-latency mode, Clear Motion Drive, Multiple Pixel Control image processing, and extensive ISF calibration controls.

The DLA-N7B has a claimed brightness of 1,900 Lumens, and there's no need for any e-shift jiggery-pokery thanks to its native resolution of 4,096 x 2,160 pixels.

Naturally there's support for high dynamic range (both standard HDR10 and broadcast HLG), but new this year is Auto Tone Mapping. This allows the projector to read HDR static metadata and optimise the image accordingly.

## Building up a sweat

The DLA-N7B looks like it's just completed a course of steroids. You get the same basic layout, with a central lens and air exhaust vents on either side, but the updated chassis is larger and considerably taller. It's best described as functional, but then this 20kg PJ is meant for dedicated home cinemas; it's not the kind of projector you whip out for movie night or the FA Cup.

JVC has decided to drop the motorised lens cover that graced earlier models, and the DLA-N7B only comes in



A bigger difference is that JVC's new 4K projector is free of the fuzziness that e-shifting introduced.

When it comes to HDR, it proves a stellar performer, and the Auto Tone Mapping is particularly compelling. With *Blade Runner 2049* (4K BD) it not only exposes all the fine detail in this native 4K presentation, but also the rich colours of Roger Deakins' cinematography, particularly during the orange-infused Las Vegas scenes; the projector's wider colour gamut (it can reproduce 100 per cent of DCI-P3) means you're getting the full benefit of HDR, with well saturated and highly realistic hues. It displays these vibrant swathes of colour without introducing a hint of banding, and delivers the bright highlights outside the casino windows without any clipping while also retaining essential shadow detail inside the nightclub.

*First Man* (4K BD) includes a number of scenes that are particularly difficult for any HDR display, let alone a PJ. For instance, when Apollo 11 arrives in lunar orbit, the Moon is gradually illuminated through the command module window. The DLA-N7B reveals the craters on the lunar surface while keeping the rest of the frame in deliberate darkness. It's a feat that lesser projectors don't have the contrast performance to achieve, even with the assistance of a dynamic iris.

Once the lunar module lands, the film switches from 35mm to IMAX and the effect is spellbinding, with strong colours, incredibly fine detail, deep blacks in the sky, and bright white highlights on the spacesuits.

Overall, this pricey beamer offers a superb performance with HDR, rendering the colour palette, extensive shadow detail and luminous highlights that make the format so compelling. The Auto Tone Mapping helps but regardless, this projector can hold its own against any competition.

The DLA-N7B also supports the 3D Blu-ray format, although you will have to buy the necessary emitter and glasses separately. Its performance here is generally excellent, with colourful, detailed images that aren't blighted by crosstalk or other artefacts. The scene where Thanos pulls a moon down on our heroes in *Avengers: Infinity War* (3D Blu-ray) is particularly impressive.

There's a good solidity to the 3D images, but a caveat is that despite the same brightness rating the images appear slightly darker than on earlier JVC models. As a result 3D loses a bit of pop and is thus robbed of some of its impact.

**SPECIFICATIONS**

**3D:** Yes. Active shutter **4K:** Yes. 4,096 x 2,160 **HDR:** Yes. HDR10; HLG **CONNECTIONS:** 2 x HDMI inputs; RS-232; USB; 12V trigger; Ethernet; 3D Synchro **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** 1,900 Lumens **CONTRAST (CLAIMED):** 80,000:1 (native); 800,000:1 (dynamic) **ZOOM:** 2x **DIMENSIONS:** 500(w) x 234(h) x 495(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 19.8kg

**FEATURES:** D-ILA device; 265W ultra-high pressure mercury lamp; claimed average lamp life of 4,500 hours in Low mode; Natural, Cinema and Animation picture presets; Clear Motion Drive; Motion Enhance; 1.4-2.8:1 throw ratio; motorized zoom and focus; Multiple Pixel Control (MPC) image processor/analyser

**PARTNER WITH**



**JVC PK-EM2:** For 3D playback, the N7B requires JVC's optional RF emitter, which plugs into the rear 3D Synchro DIN port. Expect to pay around £100, plus a similar amount for a pair of the brand's PKAG3 Active 3D spex.

**In a different league**

There are now numerous 4K projectors on the market of various flavours/technologies. Budget models can be impressive, but the DLA-N7B is in a different league.

It isn't just that the JVC is native 4K, or that it has a vastly superior contrast performance, it's also because of the quality of its all-glass lens. This is often where much of the cost goes, and its importance shouldn't be underestimated. It leads to a remarkable clarity.

The DLA-N7B's only real competition comes from Sony's VPL-VW570ES, which is £500 cheaper. That saving is tempting, but the DLA-N7B has the edge in terms of sharpness, contrast, and features. JVC might be late to the native 4K party, but this projector was worth the wait ■

**3.** Rear vents draw in air for the PJ's internal cooling system

**HCC VERDICT**



**JVC DLA-N7B**

→ £8,500 → [www.jvc.co.uk](http://www.jvc.co.uk)

**WE SAY:** JVC's superb new native 4K projector delivers an amazing HDR performance and a comprehensive set of features, ensuring Sony now has some serious competition.







# HOME TECH GALLERY

[www.hometechgallery.com](http://www.hometechgallery.com)

## TOP 10 CINEMA DESIGN AND INSTALL COMPANIES

A professionally designed and installed home cinema system  
is much greater than the sum of its parts.



Featured image: Home Entertainment Solutions

### Scotland

#### Home Entertainment Solutions

[www.heslimited.co.uk](http://www.heslimited.co.uk)

01383 732999

### Midlands & Wales

#### Custom Sound & Vision

[www.customsoundandvision.co.uk](http://www.customsoundandvision.co.uk)

0121 453 5725

### SouthWest

#### ConnectedWorks

[www.connected.works](http://www.connected.works)

0117 214 0115

### North

#### Bespoke Home Cinemas

[www.bespokehomecinemas.co.uk](http://www.bespokehomecinemas.co.uk)

0113 266 0101

#### SONA

[www.sona.technology](http://www.sona.technology)

01625 541442

### EIRE

#### Active Room Technologies

[www.activerooms.ie](http://www.activerooms.ie)

(+353) 01 906 5346

### SouthEast

#### Cinema Rooms

[www.cinamarooms.com](http://www.cinamarooms.com)

01245 790855

#### Immersive Cinema Rooms

[www.immersivecinamarooms.co.uk](http://www.immersivecinamarooms.co.uk)

01424 870763

### London

#### Homeplay

[www.homeplay.tv](http://www.homeplay.tv)

01932 781327

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# The eight-driver wonder of the world?

Harman Kardon's Enchant 800 soundbar looks the part. But will its proprietary audio processing leave **Mark Craven** applauding its performance too?

**SOUNDBARS REGULARLY SHIP** with subwoofers these days, wireless models that require just a mains connection, a bit of carpet space and practically zero setup consideration before being ready to rumble. Yet that doesn't mean one-box systems face extinction, and Harman Kardon's Enchant 800 is a fine example of a 'bar that delivers the cinematic goods from just one enclosure.

Previously [see *HCC* #296] we looked at the Harman Kardon Enchant 1300, this soundbar's larger, more costly brother. The Enchant 800 shares much of that bar's features and design principles – so much so that I reckon it might actually be better value.

Once again, there's no Dolby Atmos or DTS:X decoding offered here; Harman Kardon instead focusing on a 'flat' soundstage enlivened by its Multibeam Surround Sound system. This equates to a soundbar with both front-facing and side-firing (but angled slightly forward) drivers, allied to DSP and automated room calibration. There are eight drivers in total – six midbass and two HF – leading to the Enchant 800 moniker and an 'eight-channel' designation. The Enchant 1300 offers – surprise – 13 drivers.

There's no eight-channel audio format I can think of, so the terminology is confusing. But what becomes clear using the Enchant 800 is that its driver array is adept at delivering a soundstage with clear effects movement and localisation.

The soundbar is 86cm wide, making it a good physical match for 55in/50in TVs, although there's nothing to stop it being used with a larger screen. It doesn't stand particularly high, which is good, but has more depth. If you opt to wall-mount, it may protrude a good way beyond a skinny TV.

Style-wise, Harman Kardon has hit a home run. The Enchant 800 is gorgeous, mixing slight curves to its chassis with chrome details and a neat cloth grille.

Connect the Enchant 800 to your TV via its HDMI ARC port and CEC protocols will likely let your screen's remote govern volume. For much of the time this is how I ended up using it, but it's necessary to use the Enchant's remote for setup and source selection.

Beyond that ARC-enabled output, connections are limited to a digital optical audio jack, analogue 3.5mm input, USB port (for audio file playback) and an HDMI input. There are less expensive soundbars on the market with additional HDMI connectivity, and I've been sniffy about other premium models going down the single input route, so it's only fair to raise this as a criticism. However, I can appreciate the Enchant 800's streamlined ethos (no subwoofer, achingly smart design) may also extend to keeping connectivity simple. And one input (with 4K HDR support) is certainly better than none.

Wireless features run to built-in Wi-Fi for Google Chromecast audio streaming (including multiroom with other Google devices via the Google Home app, which is also used for software updates), plus Bluetooth.

Once wired in, you're advised to run Harman Kardon's Automatic Multibeam Calibration (AMC) tool – by holding down a button on the remote for a few seconds – but you don't have to. A series of bleepy test tones are emitted as the 'bar measures your room, aiming to adjust its output and deliver a finessed sound performance.

## Riding through the glen

With the Enchant 800 laced up to a Samsung Q8D TV and Oppo UDP-203 via HDMI, it passed the HDR10+ encode of *Robin Hood* (Ultra HD Blu-ray), extracted the Dolby Digital core from the Atmos mix, and reworked it to its driver array. The result was rather enticing.

### AV INFO

**PRODUCT:**  
Eight-driver  
soundbar with  
Chromecast Built-in

**POSITION:**  
Below Harman  
Kardon's Enchant  
1300 and Citation  
soundbars

**PEERS:**  
Samsung HW-Q60R;  
Sony HT-ZF9;  
Bluesound Pulse  
Soundbar





The presented soundstage is rife with detail that links to the onscreen action. Early in the movie we join Robin at the Crusader camp, a location awash with metallic effects and groaning prisoners. Some emanate from wide left or right, others more central, all nicely distinct. Dialogue is strong and raised above the hubbub.

Chapter 8 begins with Robin stealing bags of gold and setting off on horseback through night-time streets, evading chasers, and showering the townsfolk with coins. There's an urgency to the score here that the Enchant 800 conveys well, thanks to solid upper bass/mid-range tones and considerable dynamism; the swell of the soundtrack when he spies a handy steed is genuinely impressive, while less forceful details, such as the trebly tinkle of gold hitting stone paving is nicely defined and not splashy or harsh.

And *Robin Hood*'s fizzy approach to surround sound provides a useful challenge to Harman Kardon's eight-channel implementation. In the above sequence (around

**'The Enchant 800 sounds theatrical and purposeful, with depth to its soundstage and accuracy in its steering'**

00.40.42), our hero fires an arrow directly at the camera, its tip growing larger at it comes toward you. The Enchant 800 has enough depth to its soundstage and accuracy in its steering to impart the sense of a 3D effect. Horizontal pans across the soundstage are also well delineated.

The overall experience is something of a halfway house between stereo soundbar and surround. It sounds theatrical, purposeful and fairly largescale, while not offering the precision clarity or (more obviously) the back-of-the-room ambience of multichannel.

Whether the absence of a subwoofer (it can be paired with the optional Enchant Sub, again £620) is a deal-breaker depends on how you approach it. The 'bar has a decent low-end reach, tight, punchy delivery of bass effects and good integration. The London shootout/chase sequence in *Fast & Furious 6* (4K Blu-ray) is peppered with gun-shot impacts and deliberate LF swells as cars tumble through the air, and the Enchant 800 adds these to the rest of the mix with efficiency. It never gets close to the bass performance of a dedicated woofer (even if you set the

## SPECIFICATIONS

**DRIVE UNITS:** 6 x 2in midbass units; 2 x 1in side-firing drivers **ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 90W **CONNECTIONS:** 1 x HDMI input; 1 x HDMI ARC output; 1 digital optical audio input; 1 x 3.5mm input; 1 x USB **DOLBY ATMOS/DTS:X:** No/No **SEPARATE SUB:** Optional Enchant Subwoofer, with 10in woofer and claimed 200W integrated amp **REMOTE CONTROL:** Yes **DIMENSIONS:** 860(w) x 65(h) x 125(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 4.3kg

**FEATURES:** Chromecast Built-in; Google Assistant-compatible; Multibeam Surround Sound; Automatic Multibeam Calibration; 4K HDR passthrough over HDMI; Bluetooth; dual-band Wi-Fi; Movie, Music, Voice and Personal presets; wall-mountable; USB file playback supports 192kHz FLAC and WAV

## PARTNER WITH



**HARMAN KARDON ENCHANT SUBWOOFER:** Adding Harman Kardon's £620 wireless woofer doubles the system price, but introduces a 10in bass driver (with 200W power plant) to the mix, bringing both impact and detail to the low-end.

level to max), and that's a drawback, but nor is it using the crowdpleasing boom of a sub to mask flaws elsewhere. Taken as part of the overall package, complaining about a lack of genuine depth and slam seems a bit churlish.

As a side-dish to the Enchant 800's enjoyable movie playback, it performs excellently with music, sounding organised and well timed. A Tidal stream of Greta Van Fleet's *Highway Tune* layers Led Zeppelin-esque guitar riffs on top of rhythmic percussion and wailing vocals, and had my foot tapping. It is a soundbar that appreciates a bit of volume, though, sounding more open and expansive the higher you crank it.

Credit is also due to Harman Kardon when it comes to sound presets. The Movie, Standard, Music and Voice modes all have enough of a different signature to make them useful, without being over-egged (well, Voice does sound overly thinned out, but I suppose that's the point). Music, in particular, seems to tighten the soundstage in pursuit of a more typical stereo presentation, while still utilising all eight drivers.

## All-round appeal

The Enchant 800 combines installation simplicity and useful streaming provision with a classy, refined and energetic sound performance that's comfortably ahead of budget 'bars. Well worth investigating ■

## HCC VERDICT



### Harman Kardon Enchant

→ £620 → [www.harmankardon.co.uk](http://www.harmankardon.co.uk)

**WE SAY:** An accomplished soundbar that misses out on some features, but gets the best from what it does have. It's smart, easy to use and performs with panache.

**1. The Enchant 800 is a size match for 50in/55in TVs**

**2. Connections are recessed on the soundbar's rear**





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# Adventures in bassy-hitting

**Steve Withers** discovers if SVS's new high-excursion 13in driver really is 'an iron fist inside a velvet glove' – and if the SB-3000 is worth the £1,275 ticket

## AV INFO

### PRODUCT:

Front-firing sealed subwoofer with 13in driver

### POSITION:

SVS's mid-range subwoofer series, also available in a ported design

### PEERS:

REL HT/I508; GoldenEar SuperSub X

**WHEN IT COMES** to subwoofers there's a small number of manufacturers that immediately springs to mind, and SVS is one of them. This American company has been mining the low-frequency depths for years, and producing some of the best subs ever made along the way.

You might think a company in this position would be inclined to sit back on its subsonic laurels for a while and let its products bed in, but SVS is currently in innovation mode, delivering new models year after year. The most recent, the SB-3000, combines innovations from the flagship 16-Ultra range with a new 13in high-excursion driver.

SVS is clearly pleased with the latest addition to its lineup, promising a performance akin to 'an iron fist in a velvet glove': a bold if slightly uncomfortable sounding claim. The driver, as discussed by SVS President Gary Yacoubian elsewhere in this issue, is an entirely new design that features a serious dual-ferrite magnet motor assembly

weighing over 11kg, combined with an aluminium vented cone and an injection-moulded surround to ensure greater excursion. Its ability to move copious air is backed up by a Sledge STA-800D2 amplifier, which delivers a claimed 800W RMS and peaks of 2,500W.

## Sealed with a kick

Considering the size of the driver this sub is surprisingly small, but the design doesn't really deviate from the traditional cube with rubber feet. The SB-3000 uses a compact sealed cabinet, with a thick MDF front baffle and rigid bracing to support the extreme horsepower under the hood, aiming for an acoustically inert performance.

You get a choice of ash black (£1,275) or piano gloss black (£1,350) finishes, and there's a non-resonant steel mesh grille that's thankfully removable. It might provide protection but personally I think it's an eye-sore: give me



a traditional fabric grille any day. However, I'm glad to see SVS has ditched the irritating blue light previously found on the front of its woofer.

There are minimal connections on the SB-3000, with just a stereo phono input (one of which doubles as an LFE input), and a stereo phono output. There's also a 12V trigger

## 'Deep, thunderous low-end combined with nimbleness and tonal accuracy – the SB-3000 is sure to please'

and a USB port, the latter handling firmware updates or powering SVS's optional SoundPath wireless adapter.

The rear panel also has an Intelligent Control Interface (ICI), which is a fancy name for a bunch of touch buttons and an LED display. It allows you to adjust the volume, crossover and phase, but frankly it makes more sense to do all the adjustments using the SVS smartphone app.

This feature, first introduced on the 16-Ultra range, uses Bluetooth and makes setting up and controlling the SB-3000 an absolute breeze. You can set the usual gubbins like volume, crossover and phase, but the app offers much more than that. You can change the polarity if necessary, compensate for room gain, and choose between two presets optimised for movies or music. The more confident among you can also use the three-band parametric EQ to calibrate the in-room performance of the SB-3000.

It's a tweaker's dream. Adjustments can be done sitting at the sweet spot and – thanks to Bluetooth – even when the sub is out of sight. I'd recommend a basic setup on the SB-3000 and leave your AV receiver to handle any equalisation, but it's great to have options.

### Extreme energy

This high-tech wizardry is all well and good, but it's meaningless if the SB-3000 doesn't deliver subsonic thrills. Thankfully it does, filling my home cinema with extreme amounts of low-frequency energy.

I kicked things off with my usual test: the bass notes at the start *Edge of Tomorrow* (Blu-ray). The SVS doesn't break a sweat, energising the room with a sense of scale that is frankly unnerving, which was undoubtedly the filmmaker's intention.

Having established that the SB-3000 isn't messing around, it was time to see if it could deliver all that bass in a controlled manner. SVS subs have in the past been rather unruly, delivering low-end slam that, while enjoyable, could also be overpowering. More recent models have shown a degree of restraint, and this latest addition is no exception.

The Atmos soundtrack on the 4K disc of *Aquaman* has a colossal amount of bass, with even the slightest effect feeling like someone has just dropped an anvil. The chase across Sicilian rooftops is a great example, with every blast from Black Manta hitting with the kind of dynamic slam that will have you diving for cover. And there was a scale to the bass here that was particularly noticeable. The SB-3000 is capable of reproducing subsonic frequencies in a powerful and sustained manner that more affordable models will struggle to achieve. That's what you're paying for: a sense of authority and composure to accompany sheer power.

Yet the SB-3000 doesn't deliver these punishing levels of low-frequency energy with wild abandon; it manages to

### SPECIFICATIONS

**DRIVE UNITS:** 1 x 13in high-excursion driver **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed, front-firing **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 18Hz-270Hz **ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 800W Sledge DSP amplifier **REMOTE CONTROL:** No. SVS app control instead **DIMENSIONS:** 397(h) x 385(w) x 451(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 24.7kg

**FEATURES:** Stereo phono input/LFE input; stereo phono output; Bluetooth remote app; volume; low pass filter; phase; polarity; parametric EQ; room gain compensation; custom presets; USB ports for wireless unit; 12V trigger

### PARTNER WITH



**AQUAMAN:** DC's latest comic adaptation is fast and fun, and features an Atmos soundtrack that makes rival flicks look like mere mortals. Bass is a key attribute, making it the perfect partner for SVS's new woofer. See p92 for more.

2



1. The SB-3000 brings SVS's Bluetooth control/EQ app to a new price point

2. The steel mesh grille can be removed if you want the 13in driver on show

retain the accuracy and control that differentiates a good sub from a great one. There's a speed to the piston motion that allows transients to stop and start on a dime, ensuring that bass underscores the action, rather than dominates it. Some might miss the unbridled oomph of previous SVS subs, but these new and more refined models offer greater flexibility with both movies and music.

This is well demonstrated during the scene after Bradley Cooper's character has disgraced himself at the Grammys in *A Star is Born* (UHD BD). As he's bundled into a shower there's a drum solo on the soundtrack that the SB-3000 delivers with a sonic attack that skilfully emphasises his drunken disorientation. And drums during the various performances in *A Star is Born* have a musicality that drives the songs and gives the concert footage added presence. This responsiveness and pin-point control is typical of a sealed unit, but the SB-3000 digs deep as well, producing pulse-racing but distortion-free LF.

SVS has achieved its goal of delivering chest-thumping output and percussive bass extension, while retaining refinement and musicality – and done so from a small footprint and at a relatively affordable price. If you like deep and thunderous low-end combined with nimbleness and tonal accuracy, then the SB-3000 is sure to please ■

### HCC VERDICT



#### SVS SB-3000

→ £1,275 → [www.svsound.com](http://www.svsound.com)

**WE SAY:** The new 13in high-excursion driver delivers serious low-end slam with surprising finesse, while the clever remote app makes setup and tweaking a doddle.



# 4K for breakfast

Combining a new Powerline standard with mesh Wi-Fi functionality means Devolo's Magic 2 is a streamer's dream, says **Steve May**



**THE ORIGINAL POWERLINE** specification, which straddled HomePlug 1 and HomePlug AV, served a useful purpose – users could use their domestic ring main to create a wired data network. But speeds were limited, so as the demands from home entertainment trends soared, a rethink was clearly in order.

Enter the Devolo Magic 2, the first product we've seen to adopt next-generation Powerline technology, also known as G.hn (Gigabit Home Networking). Not only that, it comes with integrated mesh Wi-Fi. So is this the networking solution we've all been waiting for?

According to a study by Cisco, 75 per cent of internet traffic is now caused by OTT streaming services like Netflix and Amazon Prime Video.

Superfast connections to the home are proliferating, but so are our data needs. To really take advantage of this you need a good networking backbone.

The G.hn standard is gaining traction. Developed by MaxLinear in the US

and governed by the HomeGrid Forum, it's supported by global network companies such as BT, Liberty Global, Horizon and AT&T.

It works much like HomePlug, but offers greater speed. In lab conditions, it can reach 2,400Mbps. Real-world usage is considerably less; however I experienced a significant speed bump compared to earlier Powerline iterations.

And, yes, as the Magic 2 is based on G.hn, it's also interoperable with other G.hn-based products.

The icing on the cake is integrated mesh Wi-Fi. Effectively every power point can become a Wi-Fi hotspot, as multiple mesh Wi-Fi units share the same SSID and create an expansive Wi-Fi bubble.

Devolo's top-of-the-line Magic 2 Whole Home Wi-Fi Kit featured here comprises three adaptors, two with Wi-Fi/dual Ethernet and the other for a LAN connection to your broadband router. All look nice and smart, although as they'll simply be stuck in a plug socket that's not really important.

Pairing this trio actually proved a bit of a faff, and was only achieved by ultimately ignoring the supplied Quick Start guide and downloading a full manual which has clearer instructions.

If you've been struggling to stream 4K from Netflix, then the Devolo Magic 2 will be

## SPECIFICATIONS

**COMPONENTS:** 2 x Devolo Magic 2 Wi-Fi Adapters; 1 x Devolo Magic 2 LAN Adapter  
**WI-FI SPEED (CLAIMED):** 867Mbps (5GHz)/300Mbps (2.4GHz) **POWERLINE SPEED (CLAIMED):** 2,400Mbps  
**DIMENSIONS:** 76(h)mm (Magic 2 Wi-Fi); 66(h)mm (Magic 2 LAN) **WEIGHT:** N/A

**FEATURES:** G.hn home Powerline technology; mesh Wi-Fi; auto system setup, 128-bit security; Wi-Fi on/off switch; 2 x Ethernet on Wi-Fi Adapters; Devolo app; compatible with all Devolo Magic adapters/HomeGrid Forum-certified products

a blessed relief. Using either Powerline or Wi-Fi you'll have a connection more than fast enough. By way of comparison, a first-generation HomePlug AV device gave us a connection of 7Mbps (measured via the Netflix fast.com speed test server). Magic 2 saw this leap to 36Mbps.

The Wi-Fi spec is similarly impressive. Fast Roaming ensures all wireless clients are always connected to the strongest Wi-Fi hotspot, while Band Steering combats frequency interference. There's even an Airtime Fairness mode, which prioritises faster devices. Good news if you've just bought the latest Amazon Fire TV stick.

Early adopters of Powerline don't have to junk their hardware. While the G.hn standard is incompatible with HomePlug, the two different networks can co-exist. That said, a clean upgrade is probably the way to go.

## Significant step up

I've been an exponent of Powerline since its earliest days. Not always the fastest or most elegant of networking solutions, it's nevertheless been a reliable way to run a home network. This new iteration represents a significant step up in performance.

But the Magic 2 isn't just pimped Powerline; integrated mesh Wi-Fi is a practical bonus. There are a growing number of mesh systems available, including Google and BT, but this system rival combines Wi-Fi with fast Powerline without charging a punishing premium. And it can be expanded if you have a large home to cover, thanks to the variety of add-on kit from Devolo – a single Wi-Fi Adapter sells for £100.

For binge-watching families with a predilection for online gaming, consider Magic 2 an essential system upgrade ■

## AV INFO

**PRODUCT:** Powerline and mesh Wi-Fi system

**POSITION:** Top of Devolo's home networking lineup, speedier than Magic 1

**PEERS:** Google Wi-Fi; BT Complete Wi-Fi

## HCC VERDICT



**Devolo Magic 2 Whole Home Wi-Fi Kit**  
 → £270 → [www.devolo.co.uk](http://www.devolo.co.uk)

**WE SAY:** This next-gen Powerline system combines fast home networking with integrated mesh Wi-Fi. Every streaming home needs one.

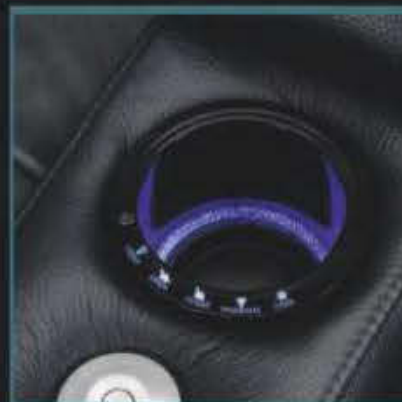


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**Jamie Biesemans** enjoys multichannel and stereo audio with this flexible HDMI-equipped streaming amp

# Sonos gets reconnected

Sonos has spent the last few years manically launching new speakers and soundbars, as well as sorting out a room compensation function, voice control and a new app. You can't accuse the multiroom leader of being lazy. But what about one of its most venerable and – to be honest – dated products?

It took a while, but Sonos has finally got around to updating its amplifier, which connects to loudspeakers of your own choosing, bringing the brand's app control, streaming service provision and zone audio flair to an existing setup. To be fair, 'update' doesn't really do the new Sonos Amp justice. It's a very different device to the previous one. For one thing, it has an HDMI-ARC connection for hookup to a TV, something lacking on the Connect: Amp.

## Slick and compact

As we've come to expect from Sonos, the Amp is designed to look sleek. It's basically a black box, with a circular depression on top featuring an embossed Sonos logo. From afar this can look like a huge volume dial, a riff on the OTT control buttons of Naim's Mu-So or Linn's Selekt. But this large circle is actually just a clever way to mask a cooling vent – and trap dust.

The front of the Amp sports controls for changing the volume and play/pause music, similar to the ones on the Sonos Play: 5. They're touch-sensitive, which makes for a clean design. It's all very different to the clunky grey and white Connect: Amp, which was inspired by Apple designs from the early 2000s.

Sonos' restrained approach extends to the back of the unit. All ports are slightly recessed, which is a small detail but allows for a tidy installation. Equally smart are the four loudspeaker terminals, which take banana plugs or pin connectors (if you prefer spades or naked wiring, you need to install a bracket included in the box). The single HDMI input also gets an adaptor to transform it into a digital optical input, and there's a stereo analogue input and pre-out for a third-party subwoofer. That's more or less it, except for dual Ethernet ports.

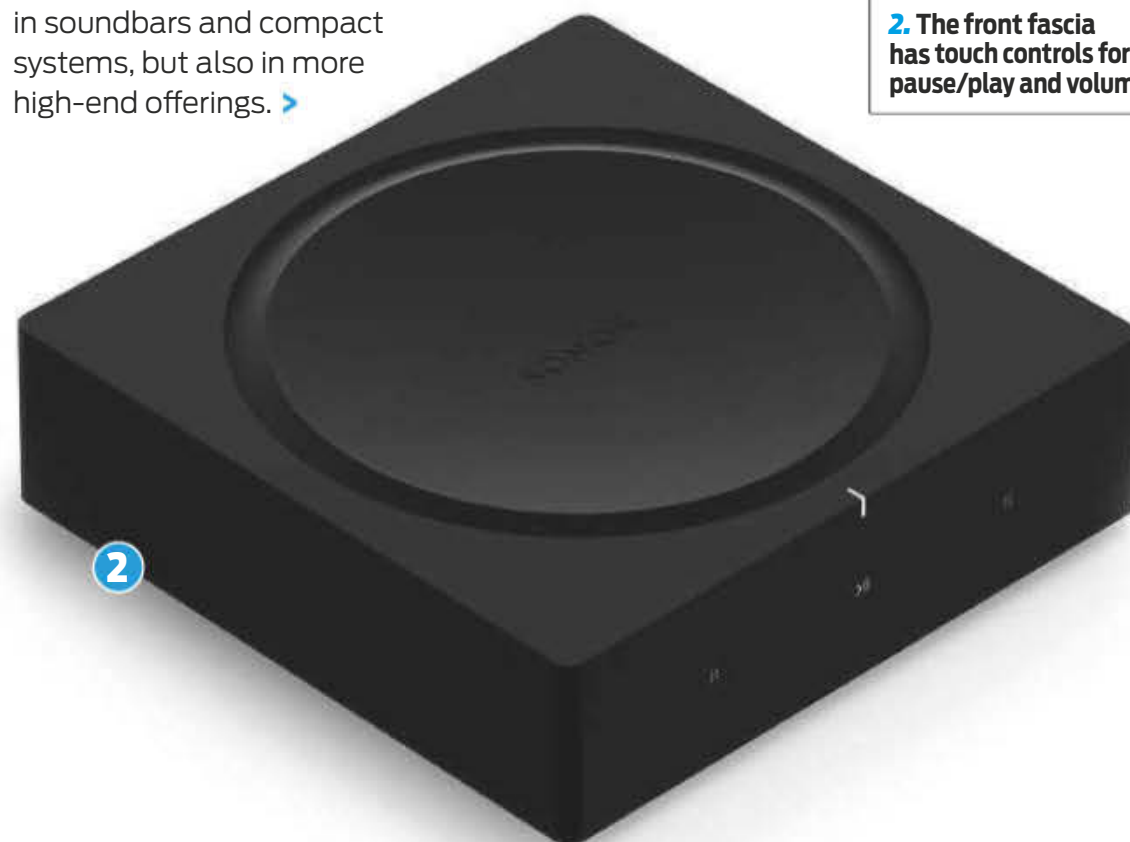
Connecting the Amp to your network and flatscreen is a doddle. Follow the instructions in the Sonos mobile app and you'll be up and running in no time. The Amp has all the features of other Sonos products, but during setup

you'll take extra steps relating to the speakers you're using. If your setup includes two wireless Sonos speakers as rears, and a subwoofer, a series of test tones is played to let you regulate volume levels to obtain better surround integration. You can also manually determine settings like crossover and levels; it's nice Sonos has some of these more advanced options, even if they are hidden away deep within the app.

Although I prefer the previous interface, the current app remains very user friendly. Selecting music is easy, especially with the universal search tool, and combining Sonos devices in a zone doesn't require a PhD in computer science.

If the Amp is connected to a TV via HDMI, it will switch automatically to that input when the TV is turned on.

Power is rated at 2 x 125W, utilising cool-running Class D DDFA technology. This is oft-used tech you can find in soundbars and compact systems, but also in more high-end offerings. >



## AV INFO

**PRODUCT:**  
Stereo streaming amp with HDMI, expandable to 4.1

**POSITION:**  
Replacement for Connect and Connect: Amp

**PEERS:**  
Multiroom-ready AV receiver; Bluesound PowerNode 2i

**1. The Amp joins soundbars, a soundbase and wireless speakers in the Sonos stable**

**2. The front fascia has touch controls for pause/play and volume**



And it's a welcome upgrade, as the Amp is definitely better-sounding than the less-powerful Class AB Connect: Amp. I partnered it with Bowers & Wilkins 606 bookshelf speakers, and Sonos faber Sonetto IIIs and Monitor Audio Gold 100s. None are really challenging speakers *per se*, but certainly the Gold 100s love a bit of control, which the Sonos Amp supplies.

**'The Amp is a versatile unit that performs well as a two-channel TV sound solution and is great for music'**

During my test I also expanded the setup with a Sonos Sub and two Sonos Play:1s, bringing the total system cost up to nearly £1,600. The wireless Sub is the most expensive component in the array, and arguably the least impressive. Adding a cabled subwoofer is a bit more effort setup-wise, but would likely be better value.

The Amp doesn't pretend to be an AV receiver. It's lacking HDMI inputs for a BD player or set-top box, and doesn't process lossless surround codecs. But it supports Dolby Digital 5.1, which is exactly what the TV apps of Netflix, Amazon Prime, Rakuten TV and others offer.

### Cuarón time

You either consider *Roma* to be the most boring film to ever win an Academy Award or a work of genius showing life in its true mundane beauty. Whatever your point of view, you can't deny it features amazing audio design. The amount of microdetail in every scene is incredible. Street vendors shout in the distance, dogs bark, creaky radios play music in other rooms... it's a *tour de force* in which director Alfonso Cuarón demonstrates surround sound is not only about dynamic beats and fast-moving action.

In the first minutes you're treated to long panning shots, with the camera following Cleo while she cleans the house. It sounds lifelike on a Dolby Atmos setup, but the 5.1 version through the Sonos Amp is still very atmospheric. The rear channels contain a lot of information, and that helps to create a huge urban soundscape, especially in the outdoor scenes. In this Sonos multichannel setup, it becomes apparent that some of the detail coming through the Play:1s lacks body and can sound artificial. But the front channels via passive speakers sound excellent, with plenty of drive and dynamism.

The battle on the beach at the start of *Wonder Woman* and all that follows are totally different sound-wise. The Sonos array manages to convey a proper sense of action, with bullets and arrows fizzing through the soundfield. It's not as accurate as you would expect from a calibrated home cinema setup, but still more than just enjoyable.

### SPECIFICATIONS

**AMPLIFICATION (CLAIMED):** 2 x 125 W Class D **CONNECTIONS:** HDMI ARC input; optical digital audio input (via adaptor); analogue stereo phono input; subwoofer pre-out; 2 x Ethernet **DOLBY ATMOS/DTS:X:** No/No **REMOTE CONTROL:** No. Sonos App instead, or use IR learning from a TV handset **DIMENSIONS:** 217(w) x 64(h) x 217(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 2.1 kg

**FEATURES:** Dolby Digital decoding; Apple AirPlay 2 support; Alexa support; multiroom streaming; 30+ streaming services supported (including Spotify, Apple Music, Deezer, Tidal) via Sonos App; custom speaker connectors; 50Hz-110Hz adjustable crossover on subwoofer pre-out; integrated dual-band Wi-Fi

### PARTNER WITH



**SONOS PLAY:1:** This entry-level wireless Sonos speaker (with tweeter and midbass drivers getting their own Class D amps) sells for £150. Use a pair for rear surround channels with the Amp, and wall- or standmount them for a slick install.



The Sonos Amp doesn't support a centre channel but mixes the left and right info to create a phantom centre. This proves quite effective in serving up clear dialogue, especially if you take care to position

front speakers in a by-the-books stereo triangle, with the screen in the middle and not too far behind.

### Somewhere in between

Sonos' Amp has a lot going for it. It's a versatile unit that performs well as a two-channel TV sound solution and is great for music, particularly with the brand's streaming service-stocked app at your disposal – Sonos converts looking to step up/away from its own speakers will enjoy.

The expansion potential to 5.1 is also welcome, as you can install a capable surround setup taking up very little space. Yet Sonos' Amp lacks a lot you would expect from an accomplished AVR, such as HDMI switching, extended speaker array options and room correction – and even something as basic as Bluetooth streaming. Furthermore, a multichannel system based around the Amp and Sonos rears can become costly.

Sonos isn't targeting the AVR market, though: the Amp occupies a niche spot between budget soundbars and AV systems. And that's an interesting place to be, with very few rivals present ■

**3. No HDMI switching here, but the ARC input provides a simple connection to a TV**

### HCC VERDICT



#### Sonos Amp

→ £600 → [www.sonos.com](http://www.sonos.com)

**WE SAY:** A neat and tidy HDMI-enabled streaming amplifier with efficient power and multichannel potential. Use a third-party woofer instead of the Sonos Sub, though.

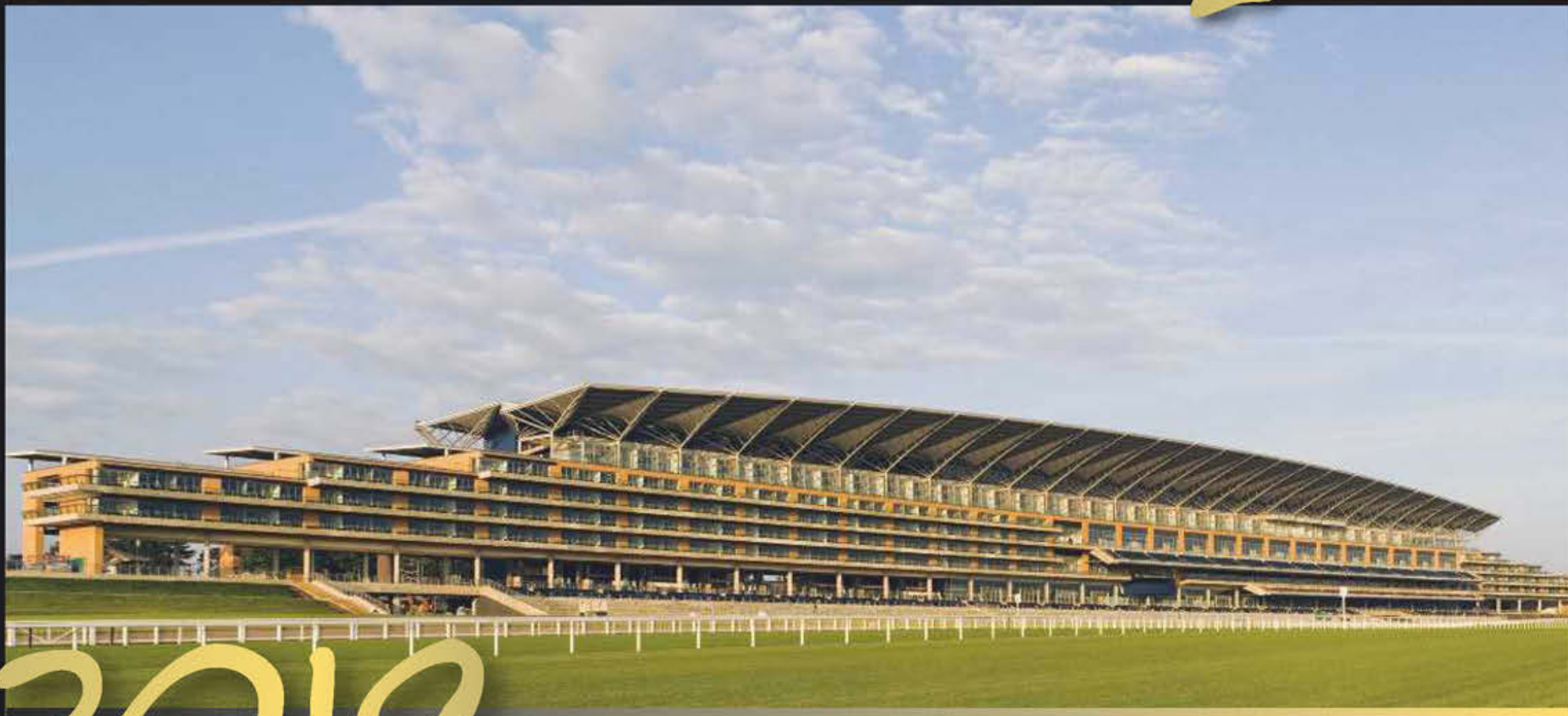


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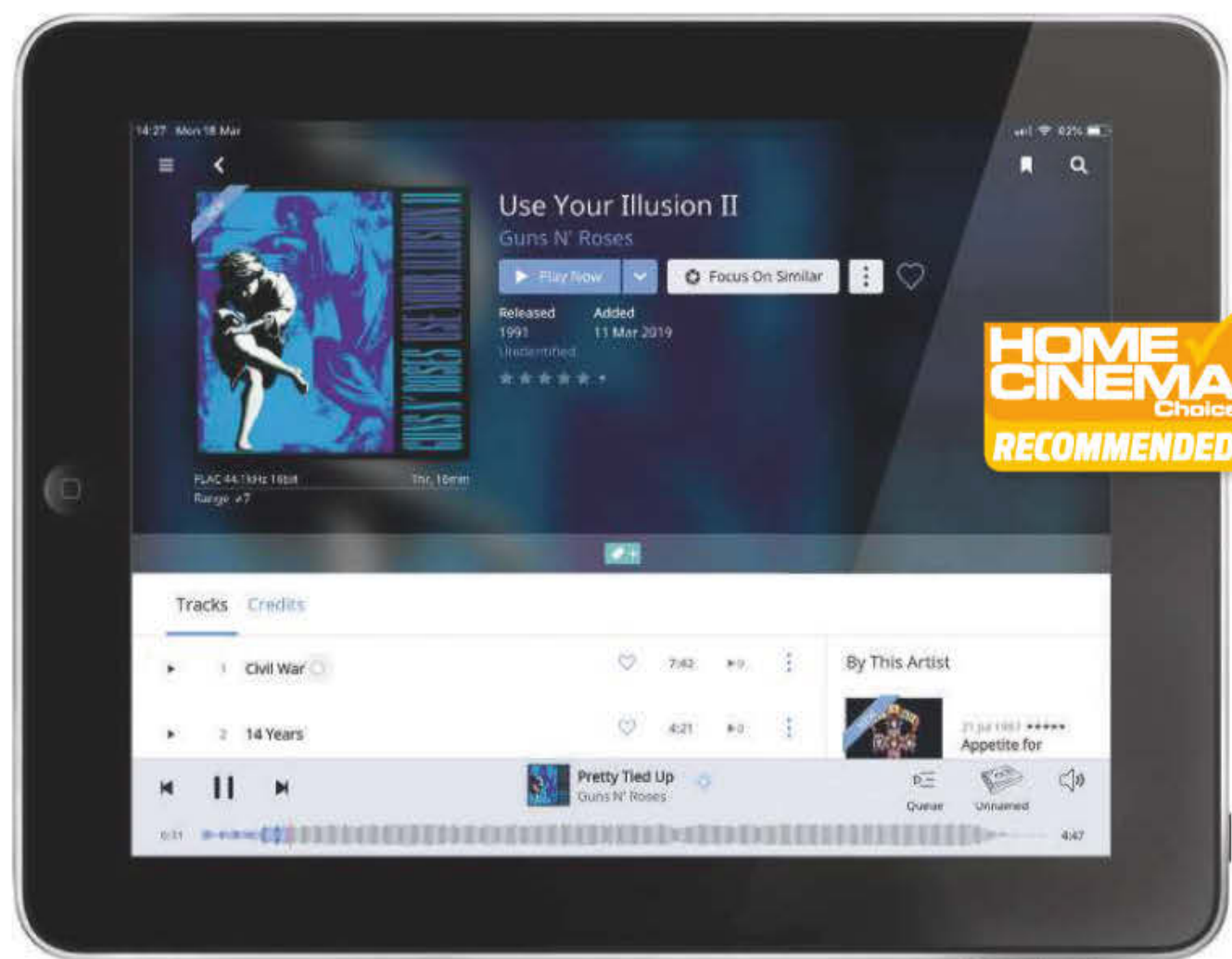
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# Stream engine

Roon claims to offer the very best computer music experience, albeit for a price – **Ed Selley** fires up his PC and puts it to the test



**IN THE LAST** decade, there's been an avalanche of AV products incorporating network streaming in their feature sets. Unfortunately, for every manufacturer who does this well, there are plenty that offer a user experience that is sluggish, complicated and fiddly. There may be a way to solve this, though. Roon Labs is a US-based company offering what it claims is the best music control software (priced \$120 per year or \$500 for a lifetime) in the business.

The process is simple enough. Install Roon on a PC or Mac and it becomes the 'Core.' This assembles all your music on the network into a single cohesive library that can be

streamed on the computer itself, or sent via USB, network or AirPlay to other devices. You can also build a dedicated Core if you're feeling really keen.

So far, so normal but Roon is only getting started. Next up, if you are a Tidal or Qobuz

subscriber, you'll find these music streaming platforms are integrated into your Roon library. Anything you favourite in them will appear alphabetically in one single collection. Tidal Masters and hi-res are supported, and if you search for an artist, Roon will search in everything.

Then, if you feel like it, you can tweak the output settings. Fancy upscaling everything to 24-bit? No problem. Even DSD conversion is possible.

Finally, you can also apply EQ and filters to the signal, so if you find your AV receiver's settings a bit heavy-handed, these can be a better option.

All this cleverness is wrapped up in an interface that manages to have all this functionality to hand and still feel slick and simple, festooned with album art. You can use a computer to control it or a free iOS or Android app that mirrors the appearance.

Roon makes great play about being more than a music collator. It will bring material to your attention based on your listening habits and adds extensive biographical info and lyrics to most albums. It isn't perfect – it's a little too easy to play two things at once, and it requires a surprising amount of computer power

## SPECIFICATIONS

**SUPPORTED HARDWARE:** Mac; Windows; dedicated Linux server install  
**ROON-READY NETWORK PLAYERS:** Available from Bluesound, Bryston, Chord, ELAC, JBL, Mark Levinson, Meridian, NAD, Naim, Trinnov and more  
**APP SUPPORT:** iOS and Android

**FEATURES:** MP3, AAC, FLAC, ALAC, WAV, AIFF and DSD file format support; integrated Tidal and Qobuz; upscaling to higher-rate PCM or conversion to DSD; user EQ; supports multiple streams/devices

**Roon is part music integration platform/part EQ tool**

to run – but it makes most manufacturer apps look and feel half-hearted.

## One way, or another

Streaming to my system via a Chord Mojo and Poly combination, I could ask Roon to behave in two different ways. With no processing applied, it operates simply as a slick control interface that means I get to listen to my music library – plus material I've been enjoying on streaming services – via a single easy-to-browse environment. Naturally, you can disappear down a rabbit hole of related artists and wind up a world away from where you started. Alternatively, you can just let it play.

Tinkering with the upsampling settings is interesting. Simply selecting 'all she's got' doesn't yield great results, sounding a little strained and unnatural as well as placing more demands on RAM and processor capacity from the PC. A 2x setting – where CD-sized files become 24-bit/88.2kHz for example – is rather more encouraging and brings a boost to the space and detail of the Cinematic Orchestra's *A Caged Bird/Imitations of Life*. The EQ settings offer huge potential too, allowing me to counter a minor bass node present in my listening room.

To get the best out of Roon, you will need Roon-compatible devices to be present in your system, further upping the cost over the already fairly hefty fee. As a user experience though, it knocks most systems into a cocked hat. If you have a large music collection and also make use of Tidal or Qobuz, this is a brilliant way to bring everything together and enjoy the listening experience that streaming has always promised. Now, when do we get one for video? ■

## AV INFO

**PRODUCT:** Music playback software

**POSITION:** Roon Labs' principal product

**PEERS:** Audirvana; jRiver; iTunes

## HCC VERDICT



**Roon**  
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**WE SAY:** Roon isn't cheap but it delivers a user experience second to none, with some excellent performance boosting options.



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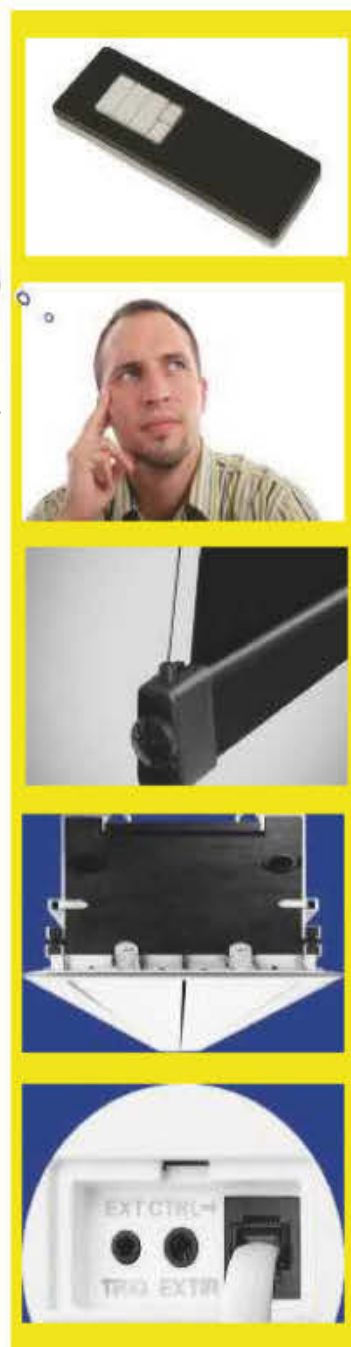
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# Digital Copy

The 4K Blu-ray release of *Alien* features HDR10+ grading, isolated scores and two cuts of the movie – but no Atmos audio upgrade. **Mark Craven** wonders if that's a mistake

**OF ALL THE** back-catalogue titles that many 4K system owners have been waiting for, *Alien* surely ranks as one of the most anticipated. Ridley Scott's film, which first scared cinemagoers way back in 1979, is out soon on Ultra HD Blu-ray (and may be by the time you read this). To put it bluntly, I'm very excited.

Allow me to go geek for a moment. For me, *Alien* is one of those movies (*Jaws* is another) that transcends genres. It's usually pegged as a sci-fi horror (including in this magazine), but that does it a disservice, insinuating it's cut from the same cloth as, say, *Pandorum*. It's both sci-fi and horror, but also a lot more than that – a note-perfect melange of set design, script, editing, acting, score and sub-text. Even the opening credits are cool.

Fox's new release brings *Alien* to home cinemas in 4K HDR guise. We're told that the restoration, undertaken by the studio and mastering wizards Company 3, has been overseen by Scott (whatever that means). Both the original theatrical version and 2003 Director's Cut (poor Dallas...) are included, plus chat tracks and the isolated score.

## Not reaching new heights

What's not included is any form of next-generation soundmix. There are two options, but both tracks are DTS-HD MA (5.1 for the Director's Cut, 4.1 for the Theatrical Cut).

So, no Dolby Atmos or DTS:X. Is this a disappointment? I'm not sure, but I know that for some people it is. It seems that you can't mention the new *Alien* 4K release in home cinema circles (okay, on Twitter) without annoyed fans bemoaning the lack of an audio overhaul. In space no one can hear you scream, but on social media they can certainly hear you arguing...

To be honest, I can see both sides of this. In the red corner are those who want to enjoy Scott's flick in its purest form, or as close to its purest form as possible. That means not only does the Theatrical Cut naturally have to be included (albeit with an HDR grade, but that's a whole other story), but the disc should offer an audio experience akin to its cinematic presentation, which in the case of *Alien*, was either six-track (70mm), or four-track Dolby Stereo (35mm). What they don't want is someone (especially if it is just *someone*, rather than someone originally part of the sound design team) **fiddling around with the soundmix adding a load of whizzy noises** above their head.

In the blue corner are those who argue that the technology is there, cinema owners have spent time and money assembling their systems, and if Twentieth Century Fox wants fans to shell out again on another *Alien* disc release, it really ought to have a Dolby Atmos track. To them, not releasing the movie with a state-of-the-art soundmix (done sympathetically, of course) feels like a missed trick, or even idiotic. I also get the impression that some aren't convinced Fox won't do exactly that in five or ten years, thus creating another disc to be purchased.

Personally, I love immersive audio, but when it comes to back-catalogue titles it's not the first thing I crave. The immediate joy for me of the *Blade Runner: The Final Cut* UHD Blu-ray wasn't the new Atmos track (something else that upsets *Alien* fans – Ridley Scott has already shown he's not averse to this sort of ret-con), but the chance to view the film in 4K HDR. Having said that, who am I to argue against giving fans what they want?

Question: Would *Jaws* be better in Atmos? ■

*Should immersive audio and 4K HDR go hand-in-hand? Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com*

The first time **Mark Craven** watched *Alien*, it was on a 21in 4:3 CRT TV with stereo audio. And he still found it utterly mesmerising







# The Hi-Fi Guy

Audiophile **David Vivian** finds giving his speakers a podium finish means he spends more time listening to them, and less time listening to his room

**A STATE OF** flux. That's the lot of a hi-fi reviewer and it's weird. I'm guessing those of you with CUS (Chronic Upgrading Syndrome) mistake it for nirvana, a perpetually rolling conveyor belt of brand-spanking-new, cusp-of-the-curve kit to sate the most insatiable thirst for rapidly evolving tech. Trouble is, for every magnificent pair of £5,000 active towers that have transported me to new sonic heights, there's a half-opened cardboard carton containing beer-budget bookshelf speakers that want me to love them. Unlike most 'hi-fi journeys', it isn't simply a matter of onwards and upwards, more a never-ending game of snakes and ladders.

Even the obligatory 'reference system' – a notional refuge where all great things synergise beautifully to set a golden standard against which others can be judged – gets pushed and pulled about as review components are inserted and removed to see what difference they make.

Maybe I'm making this sound more arduous than I should. My job is constantly fascinating. But the deep satisfaction of having just the one permanent dream system (whether dedicated to film, music or both) that's been pampered, tweaked and finessed at leisure to within an inch of its life is something most reviewers must forego – it would simply get in the way.

## Accessorize me!

But there is a plus side to all this messing around, and it's a biggie. Along with audio and AV hardware, I get to try the whole panoply of accessories and ancillaries created to help whatever the system in question perform optimally. And over time, those that really work become part of the reviewing process, both as a means of levelling the playing field for rival components by reducing variables,

and a way to hear the sonic differences between them more clearly. Beyond the usual considerations (equipment racks, room treatments) I suppose I'm talking about isolation and resonance management accessories. In my case, these are from Townshend Audio and Nordost – the former in the shape of Seismic Podiums to support the speakers, the latter Sort Kones placed under my CD transport at strategic points to drain away internal resonance, principally from the power supply and transport mech. Sounds daft, I know, but the improvement they make is very real.

For a stereo system, I find those Seismic Podiums invaluable. If you're unfamiliar with them, they're 'Load Cell' sprung platforms designed to 'break' the acoustic connection between the floor and the speaker, removing unwanted vibrations. **Your listening room is a major determinant of sound character and quality.**

De-coupling the speaker from the floor means I hear more of the speaker and less of my room.

There's no reason why this thinking can't be carried over to a home cinema, and not just for floorstanders. Since the earliest days of reviewing subwoofers, I always took the word of REL's founder, Richard Lord, as gospel. Shove it in the corner, drive the room, eigentones and all that. It was a methodology that did the job in terms of power and extension but, in my experience, tended to make subs sound quite similar. Floated on a Podium, you might be surprised by how much more information your sub has to offer – extra tonality, pitch precision and timbral texture for music, greater speed, slam and definition for film. Your neighbours might appreciate it too ■

*Have you experimented with dedicated speaker stands? Let us know: email [letters@homecinemachoice.com](mailto:letters@homecinemachoice.com)*

**David Vivian's** passions are movies, music and cars – he likes to combine them by watching *The Blues Brothers* once a fortnight



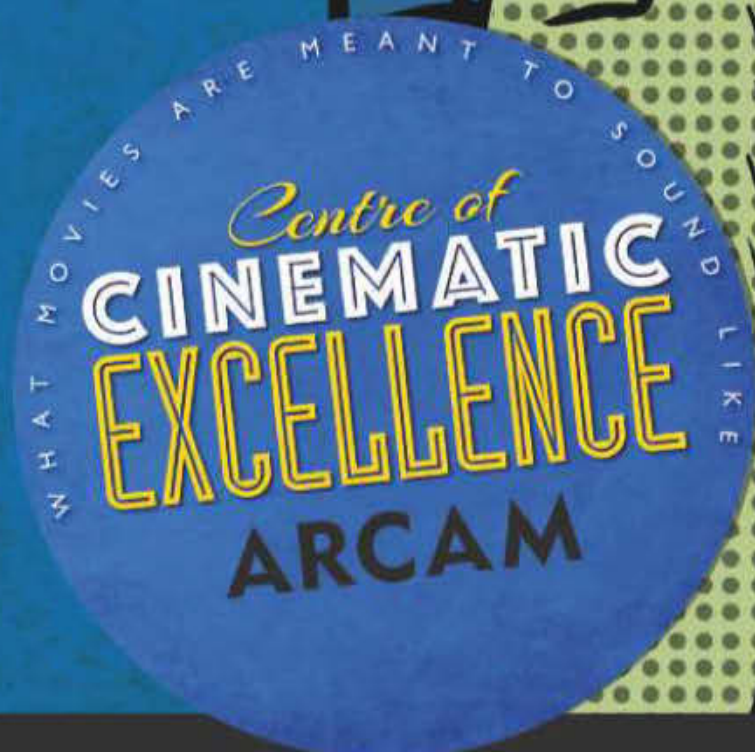


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# In The Mix

Your local cinema projects at 4K, and your flatscreen and disc player are up to speed too. So why does Hollywood still dabble in 2K? **Jon Thompson** says it's all about time and money

**'YOU MUST BE** making everything in 4K these days, if not higher resolutions like 8K or 12K...'

I hear this a lot. Then people look things up online (the technical specifications pages of the IMDb website are useful), and they discover a film has been 'finished at 2K'. Cue more comments: 'That can't be right, we all have 4K TVs – why would Hollywood be making movies in such a low resolution? It must be just the cinema version in 2K... I have a UHD Blu-ray, and that says it's 4K...'

No, sorry. If it's finished in 2K, your disc is just 2K blown up to 4K.

So what's going on? It's all about time and economy, and the fact the industry hopes the sound and the editing and the stars will dazzle you, and you might not notice the 2K presentation. If the story is excellent then you will get caught up in it and not notice the edges.

Cinema has always relied on spectacle, and you might have thought picture quality would be part of that. But if a studio can get away with it and it saves money and time, it will.

It was the same when high-resolution music was introduced. Old-school analogue masters were hi-res and always had been; digital masters were not and it meant you had to upsample them and then pretend. The same is true in the film world. When we shot and finished on 35mm film, the actual resolution of the negative was 4K or better, and lent itself nicely to HDR. Digital capture can still struggle to look natural when pushed into HDR – if you believed it was a bit of a con making 2K masters and selling them at 4K, HDR is a bigger fudge and created in post-production, meaning you might end up with a grader's idea of what the film should (or could) look like, rather than what the cinematographer actually had in mind.

## Four times table

I digress – back to resolution. The problem is that working at 4K quadruples the time needed to not only render a movie's visual effects, it quadruples the time to render out the grade. Everything has to be four times more powerful and takes four times as long. For VFX, the preference is to strive for a photorealistic feel than simply achieving optimal resolution – **image quality is not defined entirely by resolution, it's only part of the story**. And a lot of thought has gone into how you take a 2K image and present it at 4K, as at one time 2K was all you could work in in post-production, and 4K was an upscale used so the output back to film didn't look coarse.

In the digital cinema era there's no need to output back to film, and the technology exists to mean you don't have to shoot on it either. Some people still do, though, as it gives you that better-than-4K out-the-box resolution with a greater dynamic range than you need. If the industry as a whole had continued to shoot on film, we wouldn't be having this 2K/4K discussion. But it didn't.

The best solution, in my opinion, is to shoot on film, conduct post-production digitally in 4K or higher, and produce a great-looking 4K master. Some directors are able to work this way, because they have the clout – Christopher Nolan, who shot *Dunkirk* on IMAX film cameras, being one example – but many can't. Time is money.

So in 2019 your local cinema most likely has a 4K digital projector, but will screen numerous movies finished at 2K, even if they've been shot on film or a higher resolution in the first place. The idea is that most of the audience won't notice... ■

*Are you only interested in 4K discs derived from 4K masters? Let us know: email [letters@homecinemachoice.com](mailto:letters@homecinemachoice.com)*

When he's not in his screening room, **Jon Thompson** tweets about Hollywood gossip, movie-making and digital mastering at @johnnyfocal





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# Feedback

Got an axe to grind? Need to comment on current tech? Want to share your knowledge with our readers? **Team HCC** is here to help

## Slipping the Netflix net

I would like to thank you for the info about the *Annihilation* Blu-ray release [HCC # 296]. Another film Netflix snapped up was *The Cloverfield Paradox*, which I picked up at HMV for a very reasonable £7.99, so these films are being released eventually on Blu-ray!

I would still rather see movies on a bigscreen, but they are being made available at last to non-Netflix subscribers so let's hope more will follow! Oh, and I saw *Ex\_Machina* in the cinema and then bought the BD...

John Ellison

**Mark Craven replies:** This Netflix model has certainly altered the movie release landscape, and other platforms (such as Sky Cinema) have followed suit in grabbing distribution rights for studio movies. For the studios sitting on a project that they've decided is now not worthy of the marketing and distribution outlay to put it in theatres, it's obviously preferable to the previous direct-to-DVD strategy. Money in the bank, and all that.

But, as you've found, the deals don't run indefinitely, and aren't always global, so future home media releases are possible. Although I



*Cloverfield Paradox* was launched by surprise by Netflix during the 2018 Superbowl

know my colleague Anton van Beek would argue that *The Cloverfield Paradox* is only worth £7.99 for its AV quality.

This issue we've looked at *Serenity* [see p102], a mid-budget thriller acquired by Sky Cinema for both theatrical and UK VOD distribution. While there's no word yet on whether this will get a Blu-ray release over here, it is set for a US BD soon.

## I love black bars!

Hi. In *Feedback* in HCC #296 you had the Star Letter about the black bars on widescreen films and asked for readers' opinions on the subject.

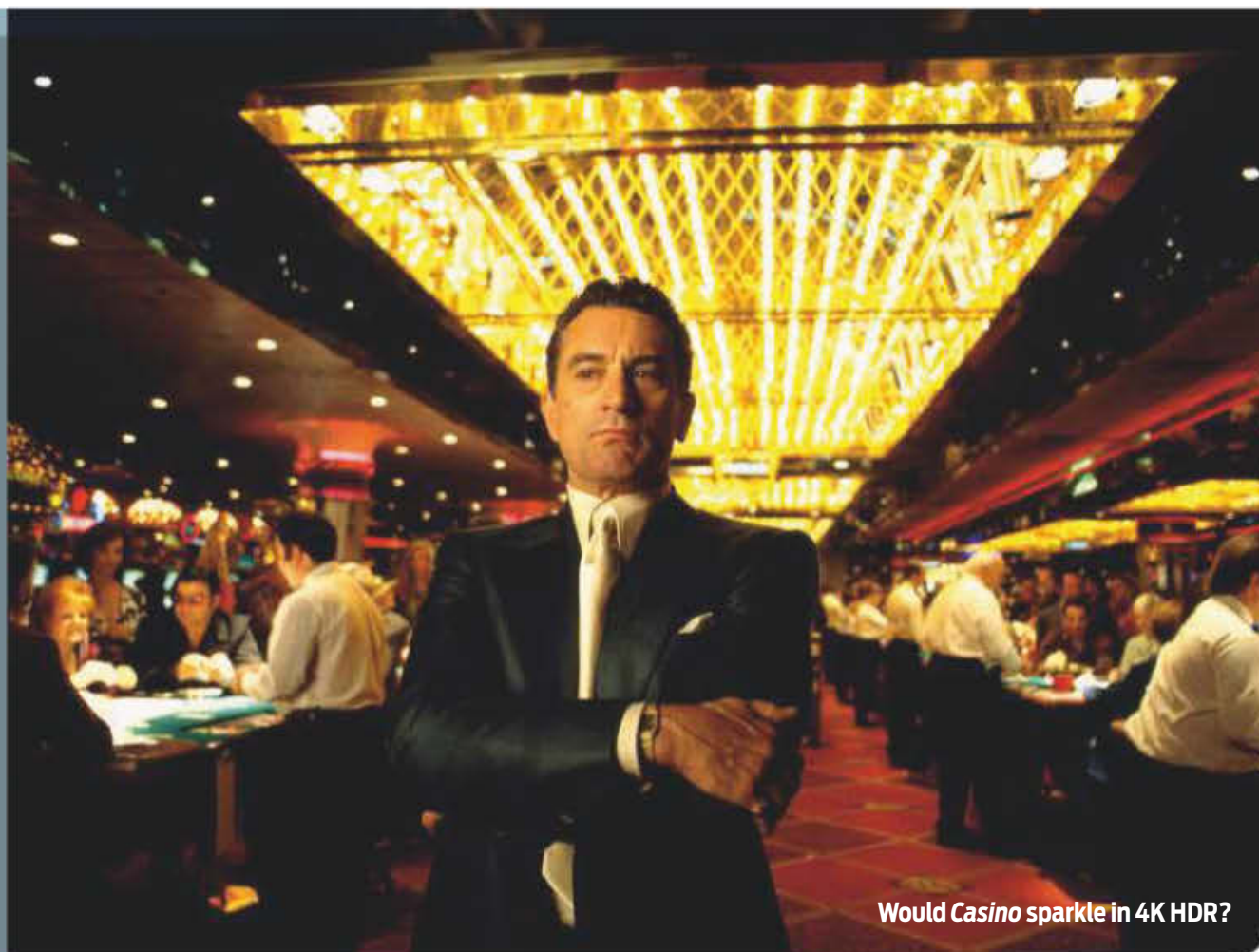
I share Mark Craven's opinion: I want to have the correct aspect ratio and would never even dream of zooming in to fill the screen. I think that the black bar issue

## My 4K wishlist

Anton van Beek asked which catalogue titles we would like to see on Ultra HD Blu-ray [Film Fanatic, HCC #297]. For me, the list would be way too long – but if you talk about 'essentials' then it would be interesting to see *Gone with the Wind* in 4K HDR, as this year is its 80th anniversary. Then there is the *LOTR* trilogy, *Kingdom of Heaven*, *Heat*, *Casino*, *Scarface*, *Face/Off*, *The Rock*, *Con Air* and *The Passion of the Christ*. *Pearl Harbor* would be an amazing Atmos demo. And, finally, James Cameron: *True Lies*, and without DNR please.

Romualds Pizans

**Anton van Beek replies:** Of those titles, rumours have been swirling around since last year that Universal Studios is preparing a 4K Blu-ray release of Martin Scorsese's *Casino*, but nothing is confirmed. As for *True Lies*, Cameron has said, 'It's coming'...



Would *Casino* sparkle in 4K HDR?



is a little like Marmite, you either love them or hate them.

Peter Addy Copland

**Mark Craven replies:** As far as my opinion goes, you've hit the nail on the head there with 'correct aspect ratio' – but I don't want to be critical of those who like to remove black bars. After all, it's not as if they're actually there when you see a movie at the multiplex...

## Dipole discussion I

Reader Terry [HCC #297] is worried that his dipole surround speakers may be redundant when he goes Atmos. I believe most surround speakers have a switch on the back that toggles between dipole and bipole (e.g., Monitor Audio surrounds).

This switch is simple for the manufacturer to implement because it only changes the phase of opposing speakers. Dipoles run out of phase in order for the sounds 'in the middle' to cancel each other out. This null area helps the speaker sound more diffuse and is particularly useful if the speakers are close to the seating area. Switching the speaker to bipole projects the sound more directly into the room and helps comply with Atmos dictums. But I would point out that he may prefer the sound of a dipole setup when he is playing the non-Atmos movies in his collection and it wouldn't be practical to switch on a movie-by-movie basis.

Terry didn't mention the brand of his speakers but if they do not have a switch on the back to run as bipoles, he may be able to reach inside the cabinet and reverse the wiring to one of the speakers so they run in phase. Personally, I have tried both positions and don't think it makes much of a difference to the Atmos sound.

Ion

## Dipole discussion II

In response to Terry asking about my Atmos setup with dipole speakers, when I designed and set up my multiple speaker system I was a little doubtful as to the outcome of using series-wired centre speakers, and more importantly the use of two dipole speakers each side for the surround channels.

I have most Atmos and DTS:X discs currently available, including the demo disc from an Arcam demo at last year's Bristol Show, and can say that they sound in my opinion as good as I have heard them on other systems. My Atmos speakers are positioned 1.8m apart in the flat part of my cinema ceiling, which means they are 2m from the closest dipole, and the sound from the dipoles travels on a horizontal plane around the room not really affecting the perception of sound from the overhead speakers.

Unfortunately, in any case, I think a movie's sound designers have a more significant effect

## ★ Star Letter...

### I'll pass on premium VOD

I just read Steve May's column in HCC #297 and had to read it twice because I could not believe people would consider paying £50 to have a new movie streamed at home. Apart from maybe the super-rich or a large group.

Like most people who read this mag I love watching movies at home, but love going to the cinema and watching all the new releases even more.

And, yes, there are haters out there who will moan about spending large amounts of money on going to the cinema as it can be so expensive.

But, to be honest, cinemas are not that expensive if you go more than twice a month.

I have a Cineworld Unlimited card (the Vue and ODEON do the same sort of thing). I have the 'West End' one, that for £20.40 a month, means if I watch anything over two movies in a month it's well worth it, and the savings on premium formats are huge. Standard price for their IMAX [Laser] ticket is about £23, but with the card a 3D IMAX movie is about £6/£7. And a ticket for a West End 'Superscreen' showing (usually around £18) is even cheaper free.

So £50 to have a new movie streamed at home? No thanks. I would rather spend the monthly rate on a cinema card.

And it gets people out of the house as well...

Lee Regan

**Mark Craven replies:** Steve's AV Avenger column discussed the fact that the proposed 'premium VOD' bandwagon had hit the buffers due to the strength of premium large format (PLF) cinemas. Hollywood studios, seeing till receipts flying in as punters fall back in love with cinema (due to next-gen audio, recliner seats and state-of-the-art projection), seem less inclined to scrabble around for direct-to-VOD dollars (the example of *Cloverfield Paradox*, *Serenity*, et al notwithstanding).

As you say, the target audience of day-and-date streaming would likely be affluent home cinema owners, but I still can't see how the business model would work. Would

Disney ever allow *Avengers: Endgame*, for instance, to be released into the wild on the same day it debuted at cinemas?

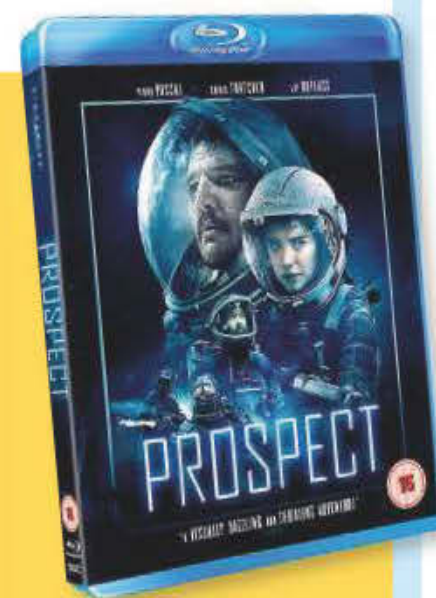
As for 'unlimited' cinema passes, I've toyed with the idea in the past of getting one, but I reckon other stars need to align to make it worthwhile. For example, if I lived within walking distance of a cinema I'd probably be much more likely to give it a go.

As you've discovered, such passes don't give you total unfettered access to whatever screen/movie you like. Cineworld's Unlimited pass, for instance, comes with the following smallprint: 'You may need to pay an uplift to watch films in special formats and auditoriums, such as 3D, D-Box, 4DX, IMAX [and] Superscreen.'

This is understandable, and if you're the sort of punter who is ambivalent about AV quality, then a monthly subscription for all-you-can-eat movies is no doubt tempting. But I can't think of many movies coming out this year that I wouldn't want to watch in either 3D or IMAX, so would end up paying those extra charges.

The good news is that cinema chains appear to have adjusted their business models and their 'product' to counter falling audience figures, and the industry is in good health – which is good for home cinema fans too.

Star letter-writer Lee grabs a copy of the stylish science-fiction/Western hybrid *Prospect* on Blu-ray. Available to own on Blu-ray, DVD and Digital HD from April 22, courtesy of Signature Entertainment, *Prospect* stars Jay Duplass and Sophie Thatcher as a spacefaring father and his teenage daughter who set out to strike it rich after securing the rights to mine gems hidden in the toxic forest of a remote moon. Unfortunately, the ruthless inhabitants of the forest have plans of their own – and the duo are soon caught up in a fight for their survival.



on the soundfield than the dipole speakers. Some movies certainly do sound better than others.

The effect maybe would be different if only two overhead speakers are used. If I had to choose between dipoles with no Atmos and directional surround speakers with Atmos, then I am afraid I would choose the dipoles every time – nearly all content benefits from

surround whilst Atmos and DTS:X is still only on a relatively small percentage of all content. Atmos content in the gaming world (which is an important part of my cinema room) is almost nonexistent!

I hope this answers your reader's enquiry, and by the way, the 8K JVC projector has now arrived and is being installed over the next couple of weeks – I will let you know my



# Sweet!



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The result is exceptional reliability and outstanding performance that's easy to hear. How sweet it is!

**audioquest**



The SR7012 sounds 'amazing', says HCC reader Nigel

impressions, and if it really is worth the price tag. I've already fitted a Samsung 8K QLED 75in TV in the living room, and so far am impressed with its performance on *all* content. *Tony Phillips*

**Mark Craven replies:** Thanks Ion and Tony for your input – hopefully it's all useful to Terry, and probably confirms there's no need to bin those dipole speakers just yet.

I like the point about sound designers having more of an impact on a movie sound than the choice of hardware. I'll add that even if a movie sounds superb, it can still suck. And, yes, I'm talking about the new *Robin Hood*.

### Adding a stereo amp

Hi. I have a Marantz SR7012 AV receiver, which drives a 7.1.4 system. I have to say the sound is amazing.

At the moment, as a temporary measure, I am running the additional two channels (as the Marantz is a nine-channel model) from an old Sony 5.1 receiver. I want to integrate something a bit more up-to-date and, frankly, smaller.

My question is: what sort of amp is best suited to this and should it be placed away from the 'mothership' to avoid excessive heat build up?

*Nigel Levitt*

**Mark Craven replies:** Well, that's a tricky one, although I wouldn't worry about keeping your secondary amp away from the Marantz as long as neither has its ventilation blocked.

There are two ways of looking at this. One approach would be to add a new high-quality two-channel amplifier to drive your front L/R speakers, rather than simply handling one of your height channel pairs. This amp could then be used for stereo

music playback, and to give your front L/R pair a performance boost. However, it's not a cheap option. Two-channel power amplifiers tend not to be as wallet-friendly as home cinema AVRs, and could well equal a sizable chunk of your outlay on the Marantz SR7012, or even exceed that. You need to look at it as something that's very much an upgrade. You aren't just shuffling speaker assignments around; you're stepping up the front-end flair of your system. Going down this route, something like Marantz's PM8006, which sells for £1,100, might be worth investigating.

(You don't say whether you are using the extra channels on the Sony to power your height or front speakers – the SR7012's Setup Assistant will let you do both).

This might not be what you had in mind, so an alternative is to shop around for a budget (and lower-power) integrated stereo amp (sub-£200) to be used for height channel duty and to reduce the footprint of your legacy Sony receiver, which is one of your main aims. Note that you're unlikely to find anything with a Home Theatre Bypass option at this price, meaning your AVR won't be able to override the volume control on the two-channel model.

As you say your current sound is 'amazing' (and assuming you have the Marantz SR7012 and Sony model working together nicely), I'd be tempted to suggest sticking with what you have if you can find an installation that disguises the size of the Sony ■

### Contact us...

Write to HCC, AV Tech Media Ltd, Suite 25, Eden House, Enterprise Way, Edenbridge, Kent, TN8 6HF, or email us at [letters@homecinemachoice.com](mailto:letters@homecinemachoice.com) Please note: we cannot guarantee to print/answer all the letters we receive. Sorry.



## WIN! Great Blu-rays up for grabs...

Head over to [www.homecinemachoice.com/competitions](http://www.homecinemachoice.com/competitions) to be in with a chance to win

### Cujo: Limited Edition

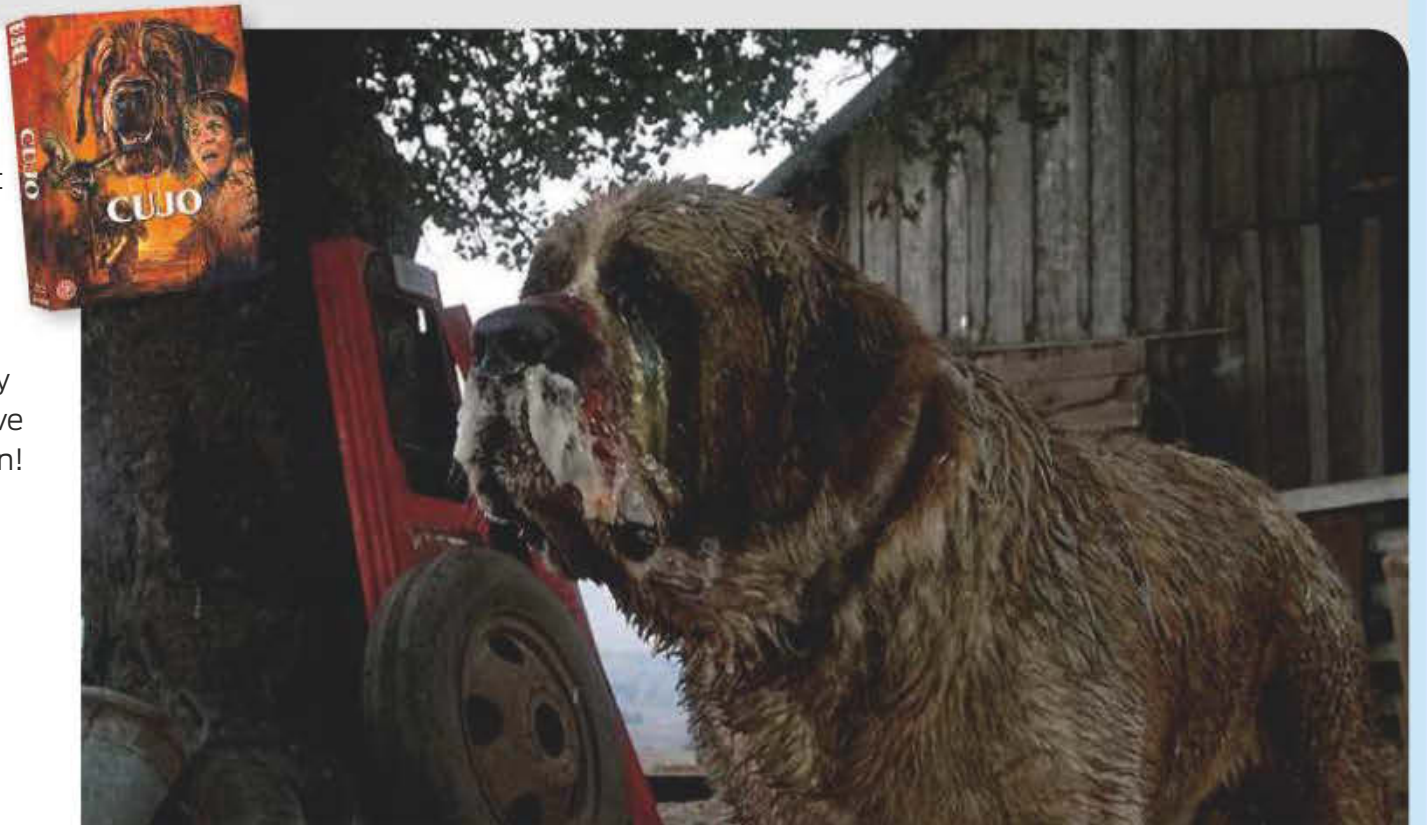
Based on the best-selling novel by Stephen King, this terrifying 1980s cult horror makes its UK Blu-ray debut as part of the Eureka Classics range on April 29. Limited to just 4,000 copies, this special two-disc edition boasts over seven hours of extras, a 60-page collector's booklet and a hardbound slipcase with new art by Graham Humphreys. To celebrate, we have 10 *Cujo: Limited Edition* Blu-rays to be won!

#### Question:

What is the name of the fictional Maine town where King set many of his stories?

#### Answer:

- A) Castle Rock
- B) Cabot Cove
- C) Trumpton



### Alien: 40th Anniversary

In celebration of the 40th anniversary of Ridley Scott's sci-fi horror masterpiece, Twentieth Century Fox Home

Entertainment is bringing *Alien* to 4K Ultra HD Blu-ray™ and Limited Edition 4K Ultra HD Steelbook® on April 22. To mark the release, we're giving away three copies of the 4K Ultra HD Blu-ray™!

#### Question:

Who designed *Alien*'s titular creature?

#### Answer:

- A) H.P. Lovecraft
- B) H.R. Giger
- C) H.R. Pufnstuf



### Hollow Man & Hollow Man II: Collector's Edition

The invisible man gets a state-of-the-art makeover in this limited edition three-disc Blu-ray release from

88 Films containing Paul Verhoeven's dazzling science-fiction thriller and its sequel. This feature-packed boxset is available from April 22 – and we have three up for grabs!

#### Question:

Which author wrote the original 1897 science-fiction novel, *The Invisible Man*?

#### Answer:

- A) H.G. Wells
- B) Mary Shelley
- C) Jules Verne



### Replicas

*Replicas* stars Keanu Reeves as a scientist whose efforts at transferring human minds into artificial bodies takes on a new urgency when tragedy strikes. *Replicas*

is available on Digital Download from April 22, and DVD and BD from April 29, courtesy of Lionsgate UK. To mark the release we have five Blu-rays to be won!

#### Question:

Keanu Reeves was bass guitarist for which of these 1990s alt-rock bands?

#### Answer:

- A) Pearl Jam
- B) Dogstar
- C) Blink 182

To enter any of the above competitions go to [www.homecinemachoice.com/competitions](http://www.homecinemachoice.com/competitions)

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# Certified: AV-Holic!

HCC reader **Richard** has assembled a 5.1.4 system in his living room and reckons anyone else with an eye on home cinema fun should give it a go

## Welcome to the AV-Holic Hall of Fame! Introduce yourself...

Hi, I'm Richard, aged 30. I really wanted to share a much simpler setup for other readers like me who only have the living room to play with...

## How long have you been into home cinema, and what was the first setup you had?

I have to say the first experience that hooked me was when my Dad brought home a Sony DVD all-in-one surround system back in 2000! I remember the speakers being mounted up high (our own pseudo Dolby Atmos back then...), and watching *Pearl Harbor* when that came out on DVD some years later. There are many scenes when the planes fly overhead.

I remember to this day how excited I was to actually feel total immersion like that.

Since then, it hasn't been until this last year that I've been fortunate to have moved into my own detached house where I have been able to have my own Atmos setup.

## When and why did you make the decision to set up your current cinema room?

I've always wanted some sort of home cinema. I had a 7.1 system with small satellites in my first rented house, but that was an end terrace, so I was never really able to make the most of it as I always worried about the neighbours. So when hunting for our first home there was some criteria I really wanted to meet in order to have an Atmos cinema, but I had to

compromise too as I knew realistically I'm not going to have the time or expertise to convert the garage.

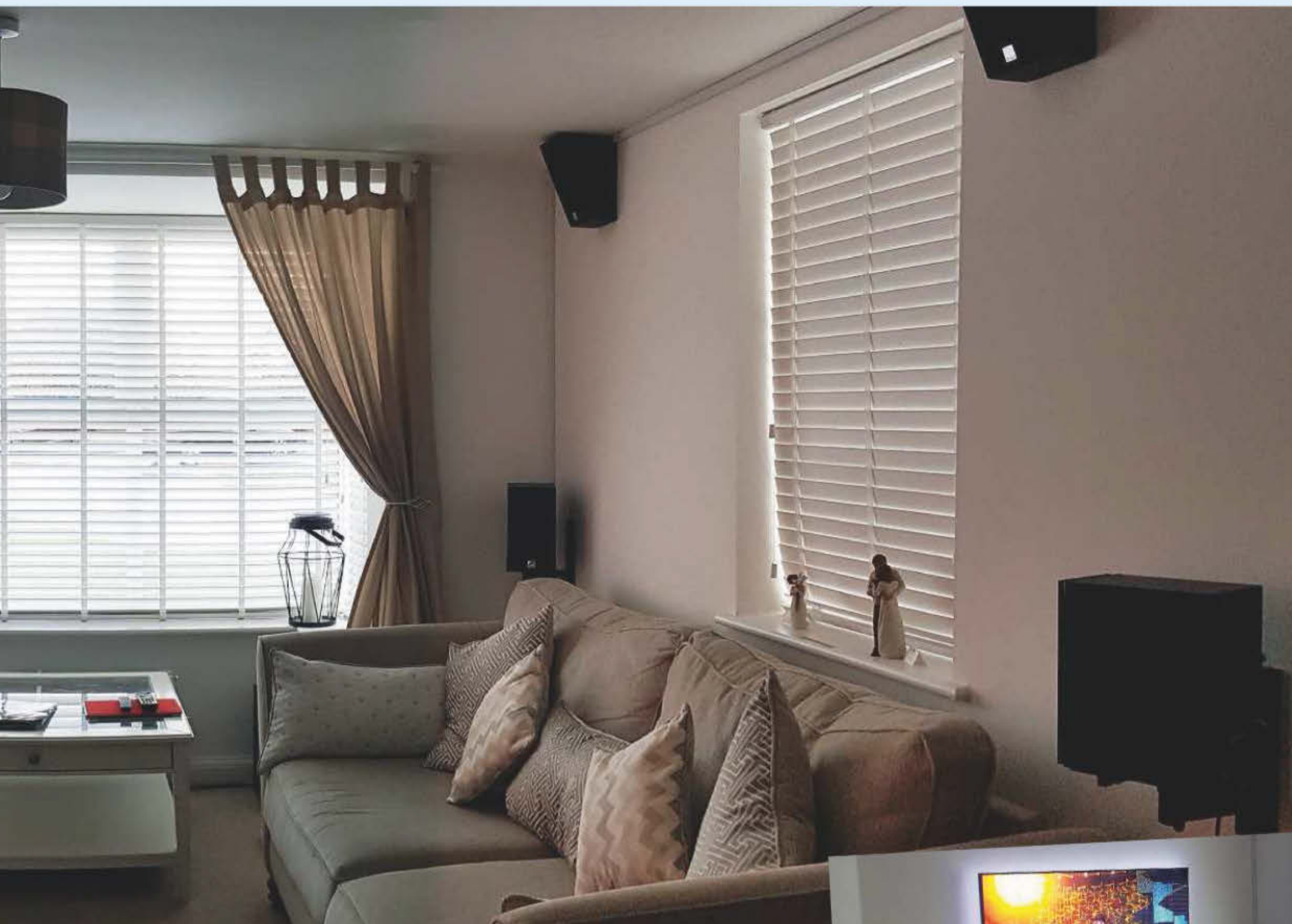
## So what kit's in your system?

A Denon AVR-X4400H receiver powers a 5.1.4 system with all DALI speakers: Vokal (centre), Z3s (L&R), Z1s (rears), and Alteco C-1s (heights). This is paired with a Samsung UBD-M9000 4K player and a 2018 Samsung 65Q9FN 4K HDR TV. I also have an Xbox One X, PlayStation 4 Pro, Nintendo Switch and an Amazon Echo.

## Did you get any help with the system installation?

No, I did it myself. I'm not a builder, and as the first home I was able to put holes in, I had to





make a few before I learned how to do it properly – behind some of the speakers are a few extra holes as I wasn't quite happy with some of the placement to begin with, but it was the best way to do it as I quickly learned and became better at it.

I highly recommend anyone else in the same position to just do it and try. Holes can be filled in and it's the best way to learn.

The main difficulty was considering the wires for the heights, but some adhesive trunking from a large DIY store wasn't too costly and does the job.

### What was the last bit of kit you added?

The TV. Fortunately/unfortunately I had a fault with a Samsung KS9000, so I was able to return it for an exchange for the Q9FN. I am so grateful I have been able to do so, as the Q9FN really is on another level!

### Do you have any hardware upgrades planned?

My subwoofer is the last piece of this puzzle. I'm still using an active sub from an old Pioneer speaker package, and I'd really like to get my hands on something a bit more up-to-date, although to be fair I still get a good

**Richard 'only had the living room to play with', but that didn't deter him from realising his home cinema dream**

**All the passive speakers are from DALI – four Alteco C-1 models are used for the height channels**





performance from it and I don't notice anything lacking in the low range.

## What's your verdict on the system's performance?

It is ace. I was slightly put off by some of the advice I got from forums and online videos suggesting the room was too small or the seating position isn't ideal, etc. However, I'm here to say to many others like me, you really can achieve that home cinema experience in your living room. Just take what you have and do the best you can do.

## What's your favourite bit of hardware?

Besides the TV, it has to be the Denon AVR. Due to having a home cinema/living room, hybrid/compromise, I wanted an AVR that could handle a 5.1.4 Atmos array without the need for additional amps, and at the time it was two thirds of the price of any other AVR that did the same job.

## What discs do you use to show off the cinema?

This has changed recently due to the change of TV. *The Revenant* is used to show how deep and dark the TV can go. *Man of Steel* (when the ships explode over Krypton) demonstrates the brightest of brights I have ever seen. But the winner of the best home cinema experience has to go to *Mission Impossible: Fallout*. That blew me away!

## And what are your Top 5 favourite films?

*Star Wars* (the whole saga), *Lord of the Rings* (trilogy), *Indiana Jones* (trilogy), *Jurassic World*, *Casino Royale*.

## Do you stream movies/TV from Netflix/Amazon/Sky, etc?

I'm as much of a couch potato as everyone else. I adore getting up and putting a disc in, but that probably happens once a week. It's much simpler to use the in-built apps on the TV.

## Lastly, what do friends and family think of the cinema?

Sadly I have no one in my real-life circle that shares the same passion as I do. Which is why I spend a lot of time on AV Forums... My wife enjoys films, which is how I justified the

setup. I always say, what is the one thing we do together, every day? Watch TV. Well then, we might as well do it properly.

That said, she really does tire of me fiddling with the sound/picture settings every other night... ■



Our AV-Holic has added bias lighting behind his Samsung Q9FN TV

Denon's AVR-X4400H has the nine channels of power needed for Richard's system

## Share your cinema system in the mag!

If you want to be in **HCC**, you'll need to send us some hi-res images of your cinema room. Here are a few tips...

1. Go big. Set your camera to take images at the largest possible size, and at the highest resolution. Don't worry about cropping or resizing – we will make them print-ready.
2. Get in focus. Make sure your photos are as sharp and clear as possible. If you have one, use a tripod, or place your camera on a flat, steady surface and take pictures on a delay. The sharper they are, the bigger we can print them.
3. Let some light in. While we tend to watch

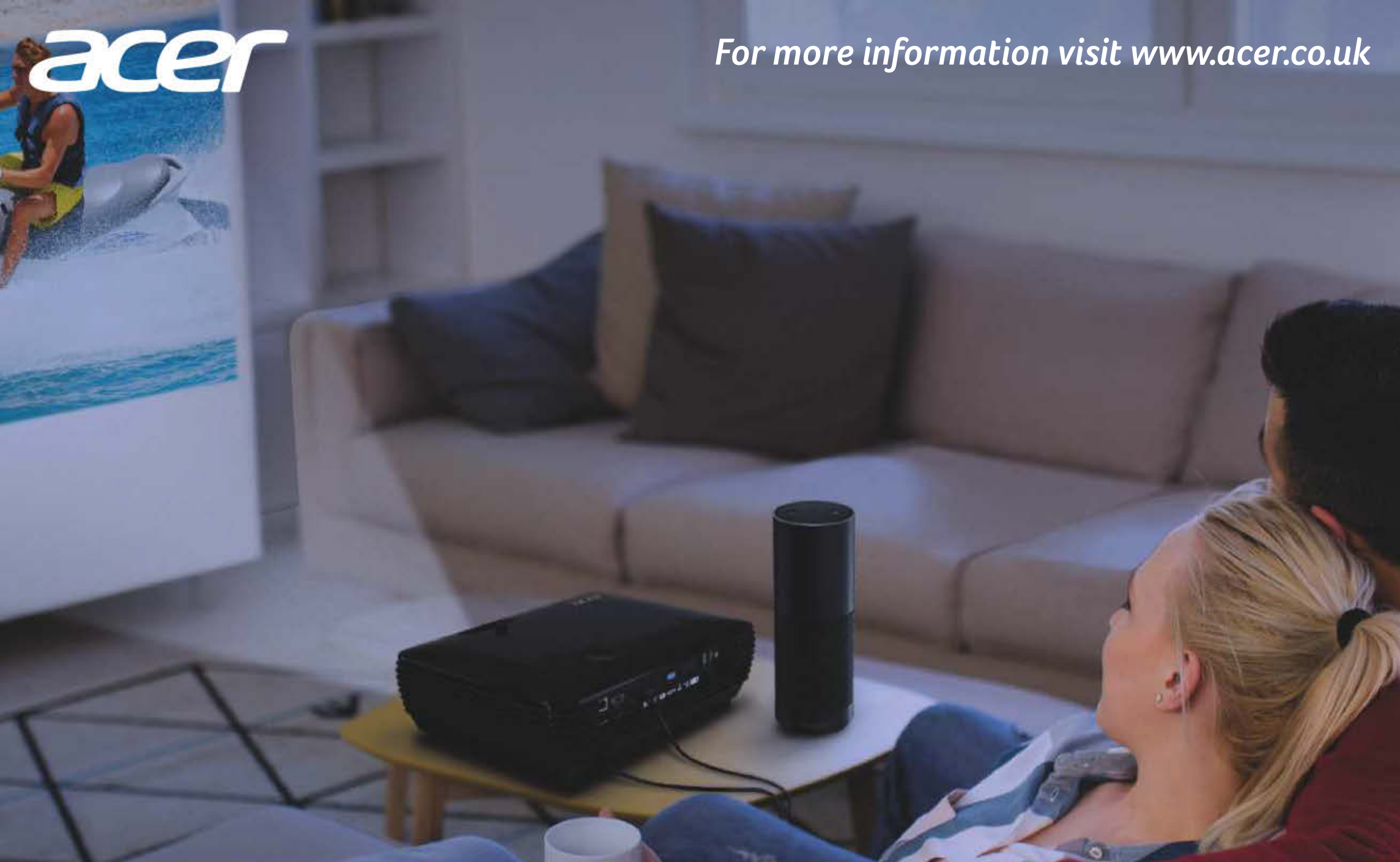
- movies in the dark, our cinema systems look their best when they are lit. If you can shoot with natural daylight, do so. If your room doesn't get a lot of light (a garage conversion, for instance) then switch on whatever lights are fitted. Avoid using flash wherever possible.
4. Be thorough. Send photos of as much of the room as possible. Images of both the front and back of the room, the kit rack, speakers, seating, disc shelf, movie poster art... The more the merrier.

5. Don't be shy. Send a picture of yourself!
6. Show us more. Got pictures of your room before it was a cinema? Or snaps of work being done? We love to see these, too.

### Now what?

Email your images to **letters@homecinemachoice.com** with the subject heading 'AV-Holic', and provide your answers to the relevant questions above – then we'll be in touch!



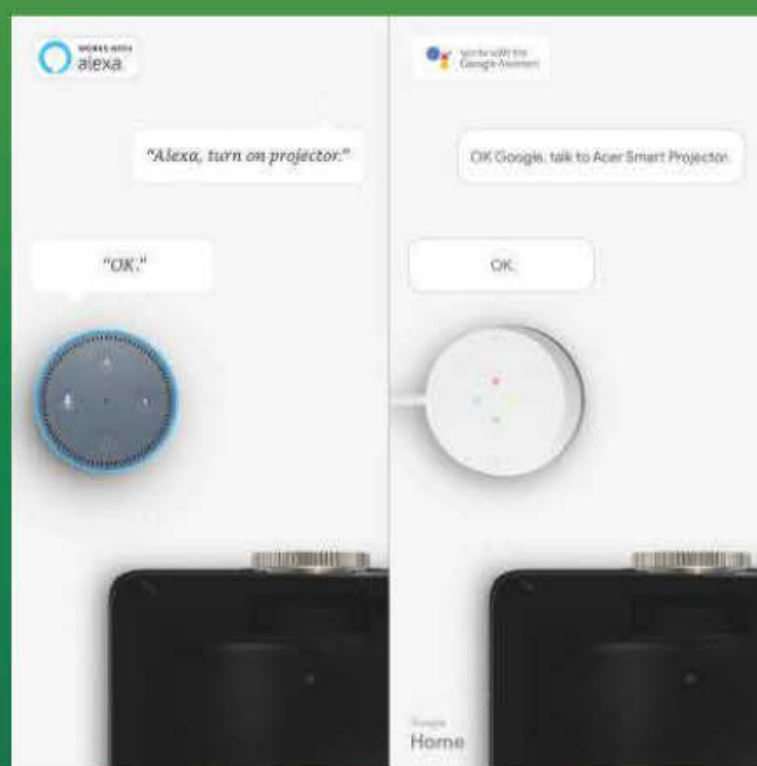


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# PLAYBACK

→ **SOFTWARE HIGHLIGHTS** **AQUAMAN** Does DC's latest superhero blockbuster sink or swim on Ultra HD Blu-ray? **GREEN BOOK** Should you import this Oscar-winner in 4K? **MARY POPPINS RETURNS** Disney sequel lacks a little magic **MORTAL ENGINES** Peter Jackson revs up another fantasy saga **PET SEMATARY** Stephen King adaptation turns 30 **& MORE!**

## Getting animated

Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse  
→ Sony Pictures → Ultra HD Blu-ray & All-region BD

Award-winning superhero animation *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* swings on to Ultra HD Blu-ray this month – but will the 4K disc win as many plaudits from AV fans as the film did from cinema critics? Turn the page to get our verdict...

### HCC RATINGS KEY...

Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★☆
Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★☆☆☆
Dire	★☆☆☆☆

All prices quoted are approximate and may have changed





That's one way of avoiding rush hour



# Enter the worlds wider web

Sony's multiverse-spanning animated feature brings Spider-Man comics to life in thrilling style



## → SPIDER-MAN: INTO THE SPIDER-VERSE

The past decade has seen Marvel Comics embrace diversity with gender- and race-flipped incarnations of some of its most iconic superheroes. The most popular of these, teenage Afro-Latino Spider-Man Miles Morales, takes centre stage in this spectacular animation that brings together various Spider-Mans (Spider-People?) from across the multiverse.

The result is an outrageously entertaining film that delivers all of the spectacular action and heartfelt emotion you could hope for, wrapped up in a dazzlingly inventive visual style that perfectly captures the comic book aesthetic.

**Picture:** First, the bad news. Despite Sony supporting Dolby Vision with *Spider-Man: Homecoming*, this 4K presentation supports neither the Dolby Vision nor HDR10+ HDR formats. The good news, though, is that its picture quality is still insanely good.

The colours of the film's gorgeous, comic-style animation look superb, especially during the almost surreal final scrap inside the dimension-rupturing machine.

Helping unlock the 4K Blu-ray's beautifully enriched colours, too, is loads of extra brightness versus the Full HD platter. The disc has been mastered to 4,000 nits – and it shows.

Detailing is fantastically good for an animated title, unearthing even more

refinement in the 'hand-shaded' animation style, as well as adding depth and clarity to all of the film's lovingly rendered settings. All of this gives you a whole new appreciation for the consistently stunning animation work (seriously, every frame is a work of art).

Once you've witnessed the glories of the Spider-Verse in 4K HDR, watching the 1080p Blu-ray feels almost criminal.

**Audio:** Thanks to a pulsating, energetic Dolby Atmos track, *...Into the Spider-Verse* sounds as good as it looks. Even relatively moderate action moments, such as the scene where Miles drags an unconscious Peter Parker around the city, work all your speakers hard. Yet the mix still has enough headroom to find extra dynamism during, for instance, the sequences in the particle accelerator.

Effects are liberally applied to every channel, including the height layer, and, best of all, there's a mischievous playfulness and imagination on show throughout that's a perfect fit for the frenetic visuals onscreen.

**Extras:** The only extras on the 4K disc are a commentary and a Spider-Ham cartoon short. The Full HD disc repeats those and adds seven short featurettes and two music videos. The highlight, however, is the 'Alternate Universe Mode', which plays the film with the Spider-Ham short and animatics for deleted/alternate scenes integrated back into it. **JA & AvB**

### HCC VERDICT

#### Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse

→ Sony Pictures → Ultra HD Blu-ray & All-region BD → £35

**WE SAY:** A stunning 4K presentation of the best Spider-Man movie ever made. Give it a spin right now!

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

**OVERALL:** ★★★★★





## The Old Man & the Gun

20th Century Fox → R2 DVD  
£20



It seems only fitting that Hollywood legend Robert Redford should end his career in front of the camera with this delightfully charming and nostalgic ode to precisely the sort of films that made his name in the 1960s and '70s. But, while Redford may be the focus of this 'mostly true' story of septuagenarian bank robber Forrest Tucker, it's Sissy Spacek who steals the film as the woman who wins Tucker's heart. Despite being released on BD in the US, here in the UK Fox has relegated the movie to DVD-only. It's a shame, but at least we still get all the extras. **AvB**



## Top Knot Detective

Third Window Films → All-region BD  
& R2 DVD → £20



Doing for Japanese TV what *Garth Marenghi's Darkplace* did for the horror genre, this affectionate, elaborate and extremely funny mockumentary charts the history of fictional 1990s Japanese samurai series *Top Knot Detective* and the rise and fall of its creator/writer/star. While this Blu-ray's 1.78:1 1080p imagery is understandably hampered by the intentionally degraded look of the TV show's visuals, from a purely technical basis the encode itself is perfectly sound. Fun extras include a chat-track, *Making of...* featurette and the original promo pitch video. **AvB**

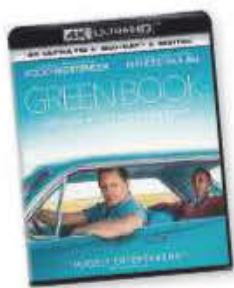


## Doctor Who: The Macra Terror

BBC Studios → All-region BD  
£20



Following in the footsteps of the 2016 release of *The Power of the Daleks*, this disc pairs a surviving sound recording with newly animated imagery to reconstruct another long missing Patrick Troughton story. Truth be told 1967's *The Macra Terror* isn't one of *Doctor Who*'s lost masterpieces, but it's entertaining enough – and the animation (presented in both colour and black-and-white) is the best yet seen on one of these releases. Bonus features include a chat-track, two earlier reconstructions (one using off-air 'telesnaps', the other audio-only) and the brief snippets of surviving footage. **AvB**



# Oscar winner hits the road

An unlikely friendship is born against the racially-charged backdrop of '60s America

## → GREEN BOOK

While *Green Book* isn't the greatest film to win a Best Picture Oscar, it's easy to see why the Academy went for it. For starters, the film's stars, Mahershala Ali and Viggo Mortensen, deliver charming turns as black musical genius Dr Don Shirley and the prejudiced Italian American employed to ferry Shirley around a potentially dangerous tour of America's Deep South in 1962 – a time where Jim Crow laws still existed, and black travellers used a so-called 'Green Book' to figure out where they were and were not welcome.

The story is based on true events, which also plays well with the Academy, while the script is polished but still authentic, perfectly paced without being formulaic, and feel-good while still landing a few civil rights punches along the way.

Some critics have accused *Green Book* of 'white saviour' syndrome – but that seems a rather unfair reduction of what's ultimately an unusually affecting and nuanced 'odd couple' road movie.

**Picture:** *Green Book*'s 4K presentation is solid to good. Its picture isn't the sharpest 4K image – a result, perhaps, of the film only getting a 2K Digital Intermediate, despite being shot in 3.4K. There's still more detail to be seen in close-ups of clothing, faces and the gorgeous vintage cars than you get on the Full HD Blu-ray, while the HDR consistently makes shots feel more life-like and three-dimensional.

The overall impression is of a competent transfer designed to gently enhance rather than completely re-imagine the film's original visuals.

If your display can handle Dolby Vision, there are subtle enhancements to peak brightness, while skin



tones (in particular) and darker hues appear more carefully mapped into the overall image tone than they are in the baseline HDR10 version.

**Audio:** *Green Book*'s Dolby Atmos soundtrack is effective enough. Dialogue is clear but still feels part of its surroundings, there's decent use of the rear and height channels for ambient effects, and the recital sequences create a good sense of space and clear tonal differences for the varying venues.

Clearly, though, this is not the sort of soundmix that's going to trouble your subwoofer much, or impress with panning effects.

**Extras:** All you get are three featurettes: one about the actors (four minutes), one about the real events that inspired the film (five minutes), and one about the history of the titular 'Green Book' (four minutes). While these include some interesting bits and pieces, they're simply too short to provide anything like the substance the film deserves. **JA**

4K  
ULTRA  
HD



*Green Book* was directed by Peter 'Dumb and Dumber' Farrelly!

## HCC VERDICT

### Green Book

→ Universal Pictures → UHD Blu-ray & All-region BD → £26 (US Import)

**WE SAY:** An engaging film, and the 4K transfer is good enough to justify the extra cost over the Full HD disc.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

**OVERALL:** ★★★★★



# Making a splash in 4K

Astonishing HDR visuals and boisterous Atmos sonics put this superhero's solo outing near the top of the UHD Blu-ray pile







## → AQUAMAN

After his proper introduction in 2017's *Justice League*, soggy superhero Aquaman (Jason Momoa) gets his own vehicle. And the good news is this day-glo blockbuster swims rather than sinks. It's a thrilling, fast-paced adventure that offers some of the operatics of other DC flicks but works entirely as a standalone piece.

Plot-wise, we're in origin territory of sorts, beginning with a brief recap of how Aquaman's mother, Atlanna, Queen of Atlantis (Nicole Kidman), fled the underwater kingdom and had a son, Arthur, with a kindly lighthouse keeper (Temuera Morrison). We then skip to the post-*Justice League* world to witness the grown-up Arthur/Aquaman being tracked down by princess Mera (Amber Heard), who wants him to return to the sea kingdom and claim the throne before his evil half-brother Orm (Patrick Wilson) instigates a war on the 'surface world'.

What follows is a largescale fantasy flick with a quest narrative, that at times echoes the *Indiana Jones* series and *LOTR*, and mixes Julie Andrews voicing a sea monster with battle sequences crammed with laser cannons and giant crabs.

Criticisms can be laid at *Aquaman* – leaden expository dialogue, a couple of incongruous soundtrack choices, slapdash ADR work and a few gags that fall to the ocean floor – but the film swats them away with ease. The focus here is on action and fun, sensory overload and epic set-pieces. And on that basis it delivers by the trawler-load.

**Picture:** Even at this early stage it's easy to peg *Aquaman*'s 4K HDR Blu-ray release as a contender for demo disc of the year. Warner's platter (which includes a Dolby Vision encode in addition to HDR10) is destined to become a home cinema favourite.

The wide colour gamut and HDR grade combine to create an astonishing image. This is particularly true of the sequences that take place in *Aquaman*'s aquatic environments, where bioluminescent creatures glow with radiant blues and the regal costumes of the Atlanteans are richly hued. Golds, greens, purples and reds (such as Mera's hair) are oh-so vibrant, while highlights from searchlights and fireballs are pushed to extremes. This is drink-it-all-in-stuff and worth the entry price alone.

The surface world scenes are more naturalistic but no less proficient. External shots during the Sicily chase/fight showcase gorgeous blue skies and solid whites, while darker scenes (such as the sub-Saharan expedition or those beyond the Trench) retain colour punch and shadow detail. Even tricky dimly lit underwater scenes don't descend into murk.

The IMDb reports *Aquaman* was captured at 3.4K for a 2K DI, but this apparent upscale, while not reference-level in terms of sharpness, doesn't stop fine details from being readily discernible.

A word on framing. The film kicks off using a 2.40:1 aspect ratio, but Warner's 4K Blu-ray switches to 1.78:1 at times to mirror *Aquaman*'s theatrical IMAX DMR presentation. We say 'at times' – in truth the film employs the full-frame for its majority. And the large-frame scenes pack more pixel detail.



Warner plans to bring Aquaman back for a sequel in 2022



Director James Wan hasn't recorded a commentary since *Saw*, so instead this release is loaded with featurettes

**Audio:** As with Aquaman himself, this film's Dolby Atmos mix is a big, brash bruiser, one that loves nothing more than cutting loose and barrelling around from scrap to scrap with barely a pause for breath. This is not a complaint, because the result is a dynamic, expansive aural experience.

Right from the off, cracks of thunder rolling above let you know the sound designers aren't shy about using the Atmos height layer, so it's no surprise to find further effects constantly thrown up there; be it the submersible moving from the back to the front of the soundstage above your head at the very start of Chapter 2, or Mera's footsteps darting across rooftops in Chapter 9.

Effects move fluidly through the entire Atmos bubble – this is particularly evident whenever Aquaman is zooming around underwater – and this aspect is aided by the clarity and precision of the overall soundmix.

The most impactful part of the soundtrack, however, is perhaps its bass. Every action scene is underpinned by weighty, powerful LFE. Aquaman's arrival in the final battle with his new friend (Chapter 12) is a show-stopper...

**Extras:** In place of a substantial *Making of...* doc or director's commentary, Warner loads the 1080p disc with a selection of featurettes.

*Becoming Aquaman* (13 minutes) focuses on the casting of Momoa, while *Going Deep Into the World of Aquaman* (19 minutes) offers a broader look at the film's production. *James Wan: World Builder* (eight minutes) explores the director's hands-on approach to designing the undersea worlds.

*The Dark Depths of Black Manta* (seven minutes) and *Heroines of Atlantis* (six minutes) allow actors to talk about their characters. *Villainous Training* (six minutes) deals with Patrick Wilson and Yahya Abdul-Mateen II's preparation for the film. *A Match Made in Atlantis* (three minutes) is a fun chat with Momoa and Heard, and *Atlantis Warfare* (five minutes) shines a light on weapon design.

Rounding things off are a seven-minute look at the film's digital bestiary of undersea critters; a six-minute piece on the technologies used to create the movie; a trio of *Scene Study Breakdowns*; a guide to the film's six undersea kingdoms; and a sneak peek at new DC superhero flick *Shazam!* **MC & AvB**

## HCC VERDICT

### Aquaman

→ Warner Bros. → Ultra HD Blu-ray & All-region BD → £30

**WE SAY:** Fabulous wide colour HDR images and Atmos sonics make *Aquaman* quite the catch on 4K BD.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

**OVERALL:** ★★★★★



## Arcade Action

Bigscreen home entertainment isn't just about movies anymore. **Rik Henderson** checks out a videogame vying for time on your home cinema system...



### Tom Clancy's The Division 2

Ubisoft → PlayStation 4, Xbox One and Windows PC → £55

Tom Clancy may no longer be with us and had nothing to do with the story for Ubisoft's latest licensed game, but it has his signature all over it. Not just on the box.

As in the first *Division* game, the US is in familiar post-apocalyptic mode after a virus passed through bank notes wiped out most of the population. The difference this time is that the battlefield now encompasses the streets of Washington, D.C., adding an undercurrent of political commentary to some of the best duck-and-cover shooting action around. And, by switching to such recognisable surroundings, it provides a graphically jaw-dropping background to enjoy during quieter moments.

These are few and far between though, with gameplay that offers a tweaked but similar experience to the first outing. You are a Division agent who can either take on missions around the city alone or in the company of real-life counterparts. It is persistently online, so you can choose to make match-ups before each major quest or even call for aid when struggling.

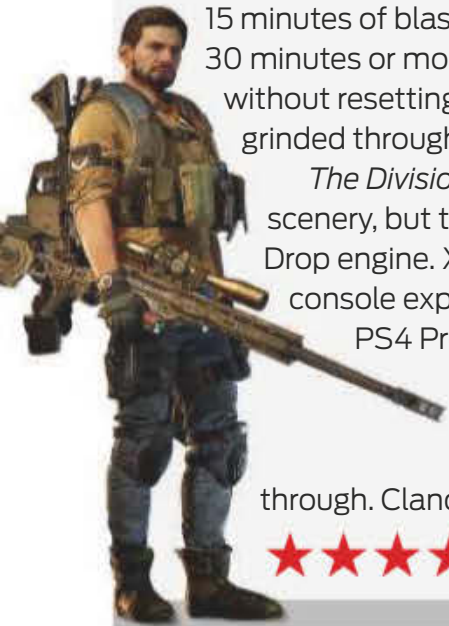
This results in a game that is definitely better when played with friends or fellow online battlers, but there is still plenty to do for those who would prefer to go solo. You do need an internet connection running at all times regardless, but that's not unusual for many of this generation's titles.

It does present one of the game's few caveats, however.

*The Division 2* is not for the casual player, who wants to grab 15 minutes of blasting in a lunch hour. Missions can last 30 minutes or more at a time and cannot be paused or quit without resetting progress. That's a huge pain when you've grinded through numerous hardcore enemies.

*The Division 2* is an aesthetic treat, not just for the scenery, but the detail and mastery of Ubisoft's Snow Drop engine. Xbox One X, as usual, provides the best console experience with its native 4K visuals, but the

PS4 Pro does remarkably well, too. All versions also have a superb, cinematic score and bombastic effects for, well, bombs. It's a well-put together blast, through-and-through. Clancy would have been proud.



## Maurice

BFI → Region B BD  
£25



The second of James Ivory and Ismail Merchant's E.M. Forster adaptations, this elegant yet passionate drama stars James Wilby and Hugh Grant in a story of a young man struggling to come to terms with his homosexuality against the backdrop of oppressive Edwardian society. Based on a 4K restoration of the original camera negative, the BFI's 1080p presentation of *Maurice* looks absolutely stunning – and comes partnered with a bonus Blu-ray housing new and archival interviews with the filmmakers and stars, plus eleven deleted scenes. **AvB**



## Wheels on Meals

Eureka Entertainment → Region B BD  
£20



Martial arts superstars Jackie Chan, Yuen Baio and Sammo Hung head to sunny Barcelona in this 1984 action-comedy about two cousins running a mobile restaurant who end up helping a glamorous pickpocket (Lola Forner). While the plot is as shaggy as they come and not all of the gags hit the mark, the fight scenes are excellent – most notably the legendary final showdown between Chan and Benny 'The Jet' Urquidez. Like Eureka's earlier *City Hunter* Blu-ray, *Wheels on Meals* looks incredible in Full HD, bursting with fine details and vivid colours. Interviews, outtakes and trailers make up the extras. **AvB**



## Upgrade

Universal Pictures → R2 DVD  
£20



Saw co-creator Leigh Whannell directs this sci-fi thriller about a paralysed man implanted with an A.I. chip designed to allow him to control his body again – only for it to take control and offer to help him get revenge on those responsible for his plight. What follows is like a lower-budget version of *Venom*, only with more invention and graphic violence. Sadly, what should be an easy recommendation is complicated by the lack of a Blu-ray release in the UK – especially as it had one in both the US and Scandinavian regions. So import one of those instead. **AvB**





Too many spoonfuls of sugar will lead to mayhem like this...



4K  
ULTRA  
HD

# Saving Mr. Banks (again)

This belated sequel tries hard but lacks the magic of Disney's much-loved original

## → MARY POPPINS RETURNS

Despite ostensibly being a sequel, this long-awaited follow-up to the 1964 classic feels more like a reboot, as Mary Poppins flies down on a kite to bring some childlike wonder back into the lives of the now adult Banks children.

The filmmakers try hard, with flawless effects, sumptuous production design and clever casting. Emily Blunt is practically perfect in every way as the titular nanny, and Lin-Manuel Miranda makes for a more believable cockney than Dick Van Dyke.

However the magic just isn't there, and a big part of the problem lies with the songs. Ask anyone to hum a tune from the original and they could doubtless rattle off three or four without thinking. If you can remember even one ditty from this sequel you deserve a spoonful of sugar.

**Picture:** The film was shot digitally at 3.4K and finished using a 2K DI which forms the basis of this upscaled 4K release. As a result there isn't a huge difference in terms of resolution, but at least this pristine transfer is sharp and free of artefacts. Black levels are also solid, with fine shadow gradations thanks to the use of HDR10. It's this aspect of the disc's presentation that offers up the most obvious differences to the Blu-ray.

The first major benefit is that the additional bit-depth delivers an image free of banding, even during the *Trip a Little Light Fantastic* musical number with its dense fog. Colours are also more saturated and nuanced on the UHD platter. The result is an image as pretty and luminous as the pink blossoms that cascade down Cherry Tree Lane.

**Audio:** This is another Disney soundtrack that has been mixed below reference level. It isn't a major issue if you just turn the volume up, but don't forget to turn it down again afterwards.

The disc uses Dolby Atmos to deliver an enjoyable presentation of the film's whimsical sound design that centres around an impressively wide soundstage. Dialogue and vocals are delivered with focus and precision, and the surrounds are used effectively. The overhead channels aren't employed as frequently, with the standout moment being Topsy's room turning upside down.

**Extras:** There's a carpet bag full of extras on the included 1080p Blu-ray, including a Sing-Along version of the film (good luck there), a breakdown of key musical numbers, and a featurette covering Dick Van Dyke's cameo. You also get a deleted song (in demo form); two deleted scenes; a blooper reel; and a half-hour *Making of...* documentary. Annoyingly, the commentary that was included with the digital version is missing from the disc release. **SW** >



Julie Andrews endorsed Emily Blunt's casting, calling it a 'wonderful' decision



## HCC VERDICT

### Mary Poppins Returns

→ Walt Disney → Ultra HD Blu-ray & All-region BD → £35

**WE SAY:** Not a great sequel, but at least the 4K HDR picture and Dolby Atmos soundtrack are spit-spot.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

**OVERALL:** ★★★★★





# Boy in the hood fails to impress...

...but this multi-HDR 4K release still dazzles with its AV presentation

## → **ROBIN HOOD**

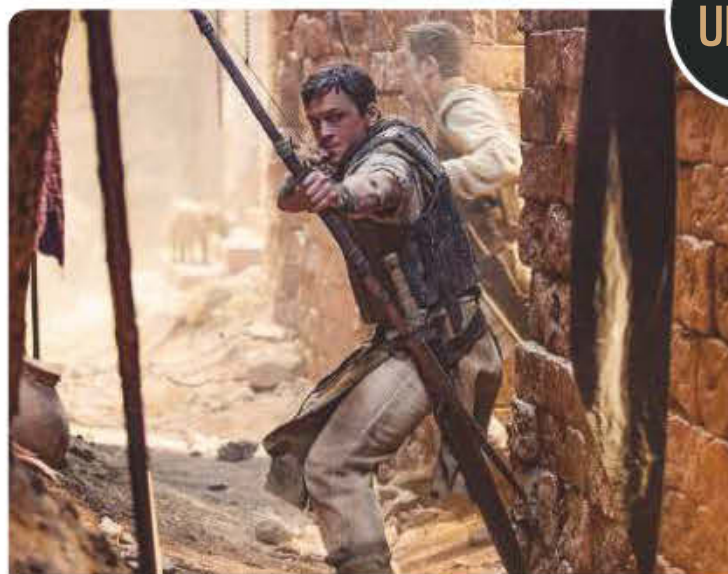
We've all grown up with the legend of Robin Hood, the forest-dwelling do-gooder who, with his band of merry men, robbed from the rich to give to the poor. But, as this new movie shows (and Ridley Scott's did before in 2010), the film industry thinks that story has run its course. Otto Bathurst's big-budget take boasts the tag-line 'The legend you know, the story you don't.' Having watched it, it's easy to hanker for the story you did know too. Even if it had Kevin Costner's awful accent.

Taron Egerton is Robin, all youthful looks and scowling gaze, supported by Jamie Foxx (as Little John, sort of...), Jamie Dornan as Will Scarlet, Eve Hewson as Maid Marian, and Ben Mendelsohn as the Sheriff of Nottingham. So all the familiar characters are here, but the narrative zips all over the place, action scenes are edited hyperactively, and the decision to retool Robin as some sort of Dark Knight-esque superhero can feel as grating as Guy Ritchie's 2017 reimagining of King Arthur (in *King Arthur: Legend of the Sword*) as a streetwise hoodlum.

*Robin Hood* isn't without its merits – there's impressive stuntwork and VFX – but ultimately it lacks heart. And an Erich Wolfgang Korngold score.

**Picture:** Lionsgate is another studio that's adopted the HDR10+ format, and this release also outputs in Dolby Vision to compatible hardware, a first for 4K BDs and sure to please those annoyed by HDR format wars. And it's a reference-level disc too.

The digital photography, reportedly captured at 8K for a 4K DI, yields a blemish-free image that's

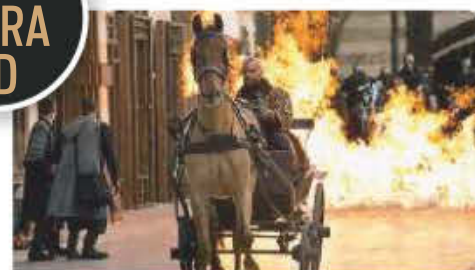


ultra-crisp. Set design details, specks of dirt and strands of horse hair all leap out of the screen, and even CG backgrounds look frighteningly real. Throw in an expansive HDR and wide colour presentation that pushes varying light sources, enriches the film's tapestry of colours and offers inky black levels, and it's impossible to find fault.

**Audio:** *Robin Hood*'s Atmos sonics are nearly as delightful, creating a detail-peppered soundfield that comes into its own with the chaotic effects-laden action beats, and builds atmosphere at all times. Score and dialogue are nicely separated.

**Extras:** Bonuses are found on both the 4K and BD discs. The main one is a *Making of...* doc (grandiosely called *Outlaws and Auteurs: Reshaping Robin Hood*) that's split into seven parts, running for around an hour in total – it's arguably more fun than the actual film. Additionally, there are outtakes and deleted scenes. **MC**

**4K  
ULTRA  
HD**



Taron Egerton's next lead role is playing Elton John in biopic *Rocketman*

## HCC VERDICT

### Robin Hood

→ Lionsgate → Ultra HD Blu-ray & Region B BD → £35

**WE SAY:** A stunning AV presentation for a movie that's entirely forgettable. So... still worth a look.

Movie: ★★☆☆☆☆

Picture: ★★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★★

**OVERALL:** ★★★★★★

## Leprechaun Returns

Lionsgate → R2 DVD  
£16



After adventures in space and 'tha hood' the *Leprechaun* horror-comedy franchise returns to its roots

by taking the same path as last year's *Halloween* sequel and ignoring everything apart from the very first film. Amazingly, the result is the best instalment in the franchise to date, one with the confidence to play with genre tropes while being as gory and silly as you'd expect. Lionsgate's *Leprechaun Returns* DVD sports a fairly well delineated anamorphic 1.78:1 transfer, lively DD 5.1 audio and a smattering of fun extras. It's also bundled with a barebones DVD of the original 1993 film! **AvB**



## Possum

Bulldog Film Distribution  
Region B BD → £20



Written and directed by Garth Marengi's *Darkplace* creator Matthew Holness, *Possum* may be yet

another pastiche (of 1970s British horror and public information films), but it's a far more serious example of the form. Sean Harris plays a tormented puppeteer whose return home coincides with the disappearance of a schoolboy. From its drab, anaemic visuals to the Radiophonic Workshop's score (all perfectly rendered by this Blu-ray), *Possum* feels like a movie from another time, and is all the more unsettling for it. Extras take the form of a chat-track and short film. **AvB**



## Boar

Signature – FrightFest Presents  
R2 DVD → £13



When it comes to killer pig movies, they don't get any better than Russell Mulcahy's 1984 cult classic *Razorback*.

But while we wait for somebody to release that film on Blu-ray in the UK, you could do a lot worse than check out this slick flick which finds some familiar genre faces (John Jarratt! Roger Ward! Bill Moseley!) battling a giant blood-thirsty boar in the Australian outback. This unpretentious creature-feature lands on DVD with a modest anamorphic 2.40:1 transfer that helps hide some of the dodgier CG effects and a full-blooded DD 5.1 mix. Sadly, there are no extras at all. **AvB**



## Candyman: Farewell to the Flesh

88 Films → Region B BD  
£15



The box office success of 1992's *Candyman* guaranteed a sequel, no matter how little it actually required one.

To say that 1995's...*Farewell to the Flesh* is better than it could have been is purely down to Tony Todd's performance as the title character; everything else about the film is standard supernatural slasher fare. Those expecting something similar to Arrow's treatment of the original film are fooling themselves; here you get a decent 1.85:1 encode of an average HD master, front-heavy DTS-HD MA 5.1 sonics, a chat-track and two interviews. **AvB**





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'It's the end of the world as we know it...'



# A steampunk stampede

Peter Jackson helps build another fantasy world, but doesn't give you enough time to enjoy it

## → MORTAL ENGINES

Peter Jackson isn't exactly known for brevity. In fact, he isn't even known for fitting big stories into single films. It's ironic, then, that by far the biggest problem with his latest project is that it's so rushed it could give Usain Bolt a run for his money.

It's easy to see what attracted Jackson to produce and co-write *Mortal Engines*. The world crafted by author Philip Reeve in his novels is imaginative, packed with quirky characters, and capable of sustaining countless stories. Its 'steampunk' flavour makes for some lovely visuals, too – something the film exploits beautifully thanks to its outstanding prop, costume and production design.

The problem is, *Mortal Engines* tries to do too much. Attempting to build a massive (literally – we are talking about cities on wheels here, after all) new film universe while also telling origin stories for a whole host of characters proves too much for a 128-minute movie. There's no time to grow any real empathy with the characters or provide any build up to the main action set-pieces. The result is a one-note assault that's almost brutally relentless.

Despite all this, we wouldn't mind taking a second, hopefully more leisurely journey into *Mortal Engines*' world.

**Picture:** The 4K Blu-ray picture quality is outstanding – and rare in that it's a 4K derivation of a film shot using 8K cameras. As you'd hope from such high-resolution origins, many *Mortal Engines* shots are breathtakingly crisp and clean. You can see



Debut director Christian Rivers worked as a storyboard artist on the *LOTR* films

### HCC VERDICT

#### *Mortal Engines*

→ Universal Pictures → UHD Blu-ray & All-region BD → £30

**WE SAY:** Frustratingly hurried film still delivers with its dynamic and detailed 4K imagery.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

**OVERALL:** ★★★★★

astounding levels of detail in the sets, actors' faces, clothing, and steampunk props.

Some of the digital effects shots look slightly soft compared with the ultra-sharp live-action footage. However, there's still more finesse to such material than often witnessed with 4K Blu-ray.

This 4K presentation makes aggressive use of the format's HDR and wide colour capabilities. The light range between the film's deep, rich blacks and bold brightness peaks is extreme, breathing far more life into *Mortal Engines*' gorgeous world than the Full HD SDR disc. Colours look much more boldly saturated and tonally nuanced, too, especially if you can make use of the disc's punchier but also more refined Dolby Vision master.

**Audio:** Joining the sumptuous visuals is a rousingly dynamic, system-stretching Dolby Atmos track. This bombards you almost constantly with aggressive transitions, startlingly accurate effects (that routinely use height as well as rear channels), and a huge dynamic range. We've never heard a city on wheels, but we reckon it would probably sound like the *Mortal Engines* mix.

The only issue with the soundtrack is that it's so constantly full-on that you may feel physically exhausted by the time the final credits roll.

**Extras:** *Mortal Engines*' bonus features comprise a solid commentary track by director Christian Rivers; a 30-minute *Making of...* documentary; a 20-minute look at the key characters; a short on the sky cities; and a short-but-sweet tour of the film's Museum of London, with its 'ancient' tech collection. **JA**



## Babylon Berlin: Series One & Two

Acorn Media → R2 DVD  
£35



The most expensive German TV series ever made, *Babylon Berlin* winds the clock back to 1929 to follow a young police officer as he navigates a world of corruption, decadence, poverty and rising nationalism during the twilight of the Weimar Republic. Although this four-disc DVD release does its best to capture the show's beautifully detailed aesthetic, it can't overcome the limitations of the lower-res format (a confetti shower at a nightclub becomes a pixelated mess). Pick of the meagre extras is a 45-minute *Making of...* documentary. **AvB**



## Ikarie XB 1

Second Run → All-region BD  
£20



Released in 1963, this pioneering Czech sci-fi film (loosely based on Stanislaw Lem's novel *The Magellanic Cloud*) follows the crew of a spaceship sent to look for life on a distant planet. Prefiguring *2001: A Space Odyssey* and the original *Star Trek* TV series, this influential piece of Eastern Bloc cinema hits Blu-ray with a new 4K restoration that brings a crispness and clarity to the film's monochrome photography. The LPCM 2.0 dual-mono soundtrack has been similarly restored. Extras include the alternate credits and final scene from the US re-edit (*Voyage to the End of the Universe*). **AvB**



## The Reckless Moment

Indicator → Region B BD  
£16



The first of this issue's James Mason double-bill (see right) is Max Ophüls' noir-tinged 1949 melodrama, which casts the actor as an extortionist blackmailing a mother (Joan Bennett) over her teenage daughter's links to a murder victim. Beautifully crafted and performed, this excellent thriller comes to Blu-ray with a convincingly film-like and pleasingly restored 1.37:1 Full HD encode. Extras include a pair of lectures and a Q&A with academics Adrien Garvey and Sarah Thomas recorded at a 2018 *Focus on James Mason* event. **AvB**



## Stranger in the House

BFI Flipside → Region B BD & R2 DVD  
£20



The BFI's Flipside imprint continues its journey into the oddest corners of British cult cinema with this 1967 flick about an alcoholic former barrister (James Mason) who is spurred into rediscovering his legal mojo when a dead body turns up in the house he shares with his terribly groovy, party-loving daughter (Geraldine Chaplin). The film might not be a classic, but the cast are good value (except the diabolically miscast Bobby Darin) and this Blu-ray's 1.66:1-framed 1080p presentation is as good as you'd expect. An eclectic batch of extras prove more enjoyable than the film. **AvB**



# Mermaid's tale is all at sea on UHD

Walt Disney's latest 4K HDR regrade of one of its animated classics fails to shine. Literally

## → THE LITTLE MERMAID

In some ways, Disney's 1989 telling of *The Little Mermaid* is showing its age. Its approach to Hans Christian Andersen's fable is pretty traditional – more *Bambi* than *Moana*. And its deliberately (and deceptively) 'classical' approach to animation will look basic to a younger generation accustomed to the likes of *Coco* and *The Incredibles*.

Alan Menken's songs are still among Disney's finest, though, and for more mature audiences there's a real charm to *The Little Mermaid*'s traditional look and feel. Ariel's underwater world is beautifully realised, breathing life into every frame with an irresistible mix of imaginative grace and gags.

**Picture:** While every Disney fan should own *The Little Mermaid* on disc, we're less sure that the disc to own is this 4K Blu-ray.

Strangely, in trying to open up the dynamic range, the HDR grade often makes the picture – or parts of it, anyway – look darker than the 1080p version. This can also crush some detail and colour out of the darkest areas. While colours arguably feel more 'solid' in the 4K Blu-ray, they also again often look flatter during all but the brightest moments.

There are some good things about the 4K HDR regrade. It looks slightly sharper and more detailed, and certainly delivers at least a few gorgeous moments where ramping up the brightness peaks and colours works spectacularly.

Overall, the Full HD Blu-ray just feels more consistently enjoyable – not to mention truer to the film's original look.



**Audio:** More successful is the 4K platter's new Dolby Atmos audio upgrade. There's more going on in the rear channels, a gentle

sense of height to the musical sections, greater general underwater 'ambience', and some surprisingly aggressive (if rare) transitions.

**Extras:** The 4K disc carries none of the extras found on the accompanying 1080p version – not even the Sing-Along mode, or the excellent chat-track by co-writers/directors Ron Clements and John Musker, plus composer Alan Menken.

Other archival goodies found on the Full HD platter include a music video and some superb featurettes: Alan Menken and various singers from Disney films discussing their work; footage of the voice actors; Walt Disney's favourite gadgets and gizmos; the difficulties of animating people using classic animation techniques; and a retrospective on lyricist Howard Ashman. **JA**

4K  
ULTRA  
HD



**The Little Mermaid was the first Disney cartoon to be based on a fairy tale since 1959's *Sleeping Beauty***

## HCC VERDICT

### The Little Mermaid: Anniversary Edition

→ Walt Disney → Ultra HD Blu-ray & All-region BD → £29 (US Import)

**WE SAY:** Not a superb 4K upgrade – and no great loss that it hasn't been released on these shores.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

**OVERALL:** ★★★★★





# Hidden horrors unearthed

Arrow shines a light on an underappreciated master of exploitation cinema

## → BLOOD HUNGER: THE FILMS OF JOSÉ LARRAZ

Unless you happen to be a connoisseur of European horror and sexploitation cinema then the chances are pretty good you'll be unfamiliar with the work of the late Spanish filmmaker José Ramón Larraz. Unlike Jess Franco or Jean Rollin, Larraz never received the recognition he deserved, despite one of his films (1974's *Symptoms*) being the official British entry at the 1974 Cannes Film Festival.

Now, it seems, Arrow Video is doing its part to help correct the situation with this BD boxset featuring three of Larraz's films – *Whirlpool* (1970), *Vampyres* (1974) and *The Coming of Sin* (1978).

Larraz's debut feature *Whirlpool* is a grim and sleazy thriller about a predatory photographic agent (Pia Andersson) who takes an aspiring model (real-life glamour model Vivian Nieves) back to her isolated home under the pretext of having her creepy photographer 'nephew' take some shots for her portfolio. The film's tag-line – 'She died with her boots on... and not much else' – tells you pretty much everything you need to know from there.

Although the 1970s were a hot-bed for lesbian vampires, Larraz's *Vampyres* stands out from the pack thanks to its dream-like atmosphere, gorgeous photography, solid cast (Marianne Morris and Anulka are especially alluring as the sapphic succubi) and transgressive mixing of sex and violence.



### HCC VERDICT

#### Blood Hunger: The Films of José Larraz

→ Arrow Video → All-region BD → £70

**WE SAY:** Definitely an acquired taste – but if you fancy giving Larraz a try this boxset is the ideal entry-point.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

**OVERALL:** ★★★★★

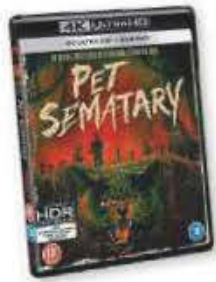
While *Whirlpool* and *Vampyres* were both shot in the UK, *The Coming of Sin* (originally released on these shores as *Violation of the Bitch*) heads to Spain for a sun-drenched slice of psycho-sexual delirium involving a gypsy girl (Lydia Stern) whose dreams are haunted by a naked man (Ralph Margulis) on horseback, who then shows up for real while she is staying with an attractive artist (Patrice Grant).

**Picture:** Arrow has undertaken new 2K restorations of all three films from original 35mm camera negative elements and, by and large, the results are rather impressive. Admittedly, the sheer abundance of native film grain present in the encodes does serve to obscure details in darker scenes, but primary colours have plenty of life and contrast levels are well balanced. Of the three 1080p presentations, the gauzy-looking *The Coming of Sin* is the most problematic, revealing a few instances of obvious damage that were presumably impossible to correct.

**Audio:** All three films feature nicely cleaned-up mono soundtracks (LPCM 1.0 English for the first two, DTS-HD MA 1.0 Spanish or English for the latter). The quality is actually pretty good – although parts of the English dub for *The Coming of Sin* sound like they were recorded in a tin shed.

**Extras:** The thorough and informative array of bonus material includes commentaries for each film; new and archival interviews; an appreciation of Larraz's early films; comparisons of different cuts; trailers; and an 80-page book of critical writings. **AvB**





# That's let the cat out of the bag

If you go down to the woods today you're in for a terrifying surprise

## → PET SEMATARY

As a new adaptation of Stephen King's 1983 novel screens in multiplexes, Paramount has resurrected the 1989 version for a 30th Anniversary UHD Blu-ray, meaning it's time to get reacquainted with the Creed family as they move into a new house in the country, discover a Native American burial ground, and... well, things go bad pretty quickly.

*Pet Sematary* isn't one of King's most beloved books, but this movie, directed by Mary Lambert from a screenplay by King, is certainly one of the more successful adaptations of his work. Some of the acting is perfunctory and the VFX weak, but it succeeds in conveying the genuine horror inherent in the film's grisly premise, and remains an unnerving watch three decades later.

**Picture:** *Pet Sematary* lands on 4K HDR (including Dolby Vision) with a director-approved restoration that offers a clear improvement over the film's Blu-ray incarnation, unearthing extra clarity, definition and texture from the 35mm photography, while retaining an organic feel. HDR grading is lightly done, but certainly makes darker sequences (Louis Creed bumping into his pet cat in the basement, for instance) easier to resolve. Colours are better presented, too, with a more lifelike punch to reds and greens. Yet even with these improvements, at times the movie can feel quite dour, with Lambert's naturalistic approach and some grim Autumn weather combining to leave sequences feeling flat.

**Audio:** The film's DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 mix (there's no soundtrack upgrade here over previous



BD releases) is accomplished without being overtly inventive. There's a decent dynamic range with LFE heft and three-dimensional feel, while Eliot Goldenthal's original score is rendered well enough to tingle your spine.

**Extras:** The single-hander commentary track from Mary Lambert, recorded a few years back, is an obvious jumping off point for post-movie viewing, providing scads of information about the production and working with King, with little dead air. Other legacy bonus bits are three featurettes from Paramount's earlier Blu-ray: *Filming the Horror*; *The Characters*; and *Stephen King Territory*.

New for this 30th Anniversary release are a range of storyboards and marketing/disc sleeve images with an introduction by Lambert; a 10-minute *Pet Sematary: Revisitation* featurette which includes some nuggets about the new restoration; and a shorter piece tying the film to the 2019 remake. **MC**

4K  
ULTRA  
HD



Fred Gwynne (far left) also played Herman Munster in *The Munsters*

## HCC VERDICT

### *Pet Sematary*

→ Paramount → Ultra HD Blu-ray & All-region BD → £30

**WE SAY:** This macabre slice of Stephen King horror enjoys a solid 4K debut.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

**OVERALL:** ★★★★★

## Dragonwyck

Indicator → Region B BD  
£16



Gene Tierney and Vincent Price headline this 1946 Gothic romp that straddles the line between melodrama

and horror rather splendidly. Before now fans could choose between a 2016 French BD based on an older, slightly coarser-looking HD master, and last year's US disc drawn from a new 4K restoration that was a tad heavy on grain management. This UK platter solves this quandary by offering up both 1080p presentations – and you can switch between them on the fly using your player's 'Angle' button. Extras include two radio adaptations and a 1969 audio interview with Price. **AvB**



## Phantom Lady

Arrow Academy → Region B BD  
£25



It's rather fitting that the first film produced by Universal's first female executive, Joan Harrison, should centre

on an electrifying female performance. Starring Ella Raines as the devoted assistant can't sit idly by when her boss (Alan Curtis) is due to be executed for a crime he didn't commit, this thrilling 1944 film noir comes to Blu-ray with a solid Full HD encode that delivers good detailing, but is also hampered by issues ranging from persistent dirt and speckles to more serious print damage. A 1944 radio play and 52-min doc about the noir 'style' are also included. **AvB**



## Cujo: Limited Edition

Eureka Classic → Region B BD  
£30



This month's second Stephen King film may not be getting a 4K upgrade like *Pet Sematary*, but that's not to say that Eureka hasn't put together an exceptional package with its

limited edition two-disc release of King's killer dog flick. While the label hasn't provided any details about the source materials used for the Blu-ray, there's no doubting the vibrant colours and impressive clarity of the 1.85:1 Full HD encode. Bonus goodies include a chat-track by film historian Lee Gambin; a three-part *Making of...*; lengthy cast and crew interviews; and a fascinating feature-length Q&A with actress Dee Wallace. **AvB**





# Netflix Original runs to the jungle

Oscar Isaac and Ben Affleck lead a glossy action heist that's light on quips, heavy on remorse

## → **TRIPLE FRONTIER**

*Triple Frontier*, a reference to the jungle bordered by Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil, is a big-budget action heist movie with a brutal heart. Don't stream expecting an action joyride. *The Expendables* it ain't.

Oscar Isaac's government agent has a plan to steal \$75m from a cartel boss. Not only does he know where the drug lord has his base and keeps his millions, he also knows people with the skills to carry out his plan: former army buddies Ben Affleck, Charlie Hunnam, Garrett Hedlund and Pedro Pascal.

While this setup is straight from the 1980s DTV action-thriller playbook, it's tonally a different beast. The operation is derailed by greed, then goes from bad to worse. As we've seen before with the likes of *Bright*, *Annihilation* and *Roma*, Netflix isn't afraid to confound expectations.

Kathryn Bigelow and writer Mark Boal, whose past credits include *The Hurt Locker* and *Zero Dark Thirty*, claim co-producer status, while J.C. Chandor directs the action with easy confidence. The opening showdown with local gangbangers is slick and compelling, and the pivotal attack on the mobster stronghold tense and thrilling. But Chandor isn't afraid to slam on the brakes in order to emphasise the grim inevitability of the escapade.

**Picture:** This movie looks expensive. Netflix hasn't confirmed a budget, but it's up there with *Bright* and Scorsese's *The Irishman* as a major 'Netflix Original'. The cinematography is excellent. Shot in Super Panavision 70, with a denuded

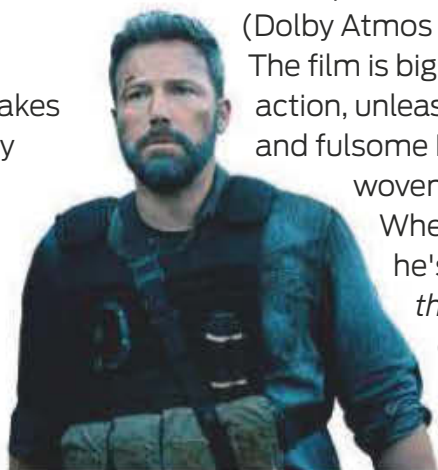


colour grade, it's as cinematic as you like.

The sweeping aerial shots, as the squad try and make their escape by chopper over a mountain range, are stunning. Available in 4K HDR (and Dolby Vision if your gear supports it), there's an abundance of authentic detail in the various spectacular locales.

**Audio:** *Triple Frontier* boasts a multichannel track (Dolby Atmos on some streaming platforms). The film is big on kinetic firefights and explosive action, unleashing plenty of sonic shrapnel and fulsome LFE. However, it's the little details woven into the mix that really delight.

When we first meet Isaac's character he's listening to Metallica's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (drummer Lars Ulrich contributed to the score), and the track flips between tinny audio on his earbuds to full surround. **SM**



## **HCC VERDICT**

### **Triple Frontier**

→ Netflix Original

**WE SAY:** A big-budget, well-constructed action thriller with a mean streak. We like.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

**OVERALL:** ★★★★★

## → **SERENITY**

→ Sky Cinema

Back in the mid-2000s, when Matthew McConaughey was popping up in every romcom going, no one would have imagined his career developing the way it has. But with a Best Actor gong for *Dallas Buyers Club* under his belt, and acclaim for his roles in *Interstellar*, *The Wolf of Wall Street* and *True Detective* (to name three), he's part of the A-list. That's not to say he's not averse to making some odd choices, which may explain his involvement in this bonkers thriller snapped up by Sky for a simultaneous VOD/theatrical release.

Written and directed by Steven Knight (*Eastern Promises*, *Peaky Blinders*), *Serenity* casts the big Mac as a Floridian island fisherman who – and this may or may not be important – is continually hunting for a giant tuna called 'Justice'. His ex-wife (Anne Hathaway) then appears on the scene, offering him a pile of cash to kill her new abusive husband (Jason Clarke), and thus protect his estranged son.



**Hathaway and McConaughey also appeared together in sci-fi drama *Interstellar* in 2014**

That probably all reads like the premise of a steamy, sun-drenched neo-noir, the like of which we've seen countless times before. Yet Knight has other ideas, executing a narrative twist that doesn't so much pull the rug out from under you as walk off with all the fixtures and fittings too.

And that's all we'll say on the matter, beyond *Serenity* definitely not being what you might expect, and not necessarily very good, either. It is very weird, and it's easy to see why it only received a limited theatrical release in the US, despite the heavyweight cast.

The movie downloads from Sky in UHD and looks fresh. Knight is an accomplished director with an eye for striking visuals, and the frequent bursts of sun-kissed seas and blue skies will leave you wondering what an HDR presentation might have looked like. **MC**





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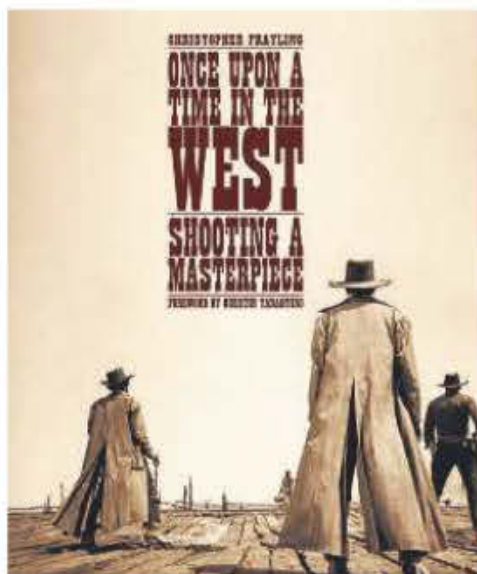
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# 'Keep your lovin' brother happy'

Fans of Sergio Leone's masterpiece will get a kick out of this in-depth account of its production



The book is lavishly illustrated with rare production art and on-set photographs by the late Angelo Novi

## → ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST: SHOOTING A MASTERPIECE

Sir Christopher Frayling → Reel Art Books → £50

It's hard to believe that it wasn't until the late 1970s/early 1980s that critics started to reappraise Sergio Leone's 'spaghetti' Westerns as something worthy of serious consideration (in the UK and US, that is – as usual French critics had got it right from the very start). The consensus today, of course, is very different – but this lengthy period of critical catch-up means there are still some large gaps when it comes to detailed critical and historical analyses of Leone's movies.

As the author of 1981's *Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone*, 2000's *Sergio Leone: Something to Do With Death* and 2005's *Sergio Leone: Once Upon a Time in Italy*, academic Sir Christopher Frayling is perfectly placed to chart the production of Leone's magnum opus, *Once Upon a Time in the West*. And for a film that turned 50 last year, it's hard to imagine a better birthday gift than this superb book.

Following a typically verbose and meandering foreword from Quentin Tarantino, Frayling's 32-page introduction outlines the film's production and the autobiographical elements Leone slipped into it.

After that, we get to the meat of the book: a collection of interviews Frayling has conducted over the years with people involved in the making of the film. The sheer amount of people featured, running



from Leone himself to English-language version scripter Mickey Knox, via Bernardo Bertolucci, Henry Fonda, Ennio Morricone and Carlo Simi, is simply staggering. It all adds up to a remarkably thorough exploration of both the production and the man who masterminded it.

As if that wasn't enough, Frayling also includes a copy of the original story treatment; a day-by-day log of principal photography; descriptions of the main cut sequences (with accompanying photos); tributes from other filmmakers; and a detailed account of the famous final scene.

This is the definitive account of the making and legacy of Leone's epic. Highly recommended.  
[www.reelartpress.com](http://www.reelartpress.com)



## LEGO Star Wars 20th Anniversary Sets

The LEGO Group → £20-£110



It's 20 years since LEGO first acquired the *Star Wars* license and the toymaker is celebrating with a new series of specially-branded sets. The range consists of revised models of the Imperial Dropship (£20), Clone Scout Walker (£25), Anakin's Podracer (£25), Snowspeeder (£35) and Slave I (£110, pictured) – each packaged with an exclusive reproduction of an iconic *Star Wars* character's original minifigure on a special display stand.

Speaking of minifigs, the new Slave I set also marks the first appearance in LEGO of the bounty hunter Zuckuss, which is sure to boost its popularity with franchise fans.  
<https://shop.lego.com/en-GB>

## Vault of Horror: The Italian Connection – Vol. 2

Various Artists → Demon Music Group → £30



This follow-up to 2017's sublime *Vault of Horror: The Italian Connection* album sees Demon Music rounding up another collection of choice cuts from the golden age of Italian cinema. Among the 20 unforgettable tracks included on the 180g double-disc vinyl release are Fabio Frizzi's *Baby Sequenza 1* from *Manhattan Baby*, Ennio Morricone's *La Lucertola* from *Lizard in a Woman's Skin* and Bill Wyman & Terry Taylor's title theme from *Opera*. As with the first volume, the new album boasts brand-new artwork by Graham Humphreys and sleeve notes by genre expert Alan Jones.  
[www.demonmusicgroup.co.uk](http://www.demonmusicgroup.co.uk)

## Minimal Film

Matteo Civaschi → Skira Editore → £25



Welcome to the world of 'shortology'. The brainchild of Milan-based design studio H-57, 'shortology' has been described by the studio's Executive Creative Director (and *Minimal Film* author) Matteo Civaschi as graphically reimagining something 'in the shortest and funniest possible way' – and this book is all about doing it for movies (and a few TV shows, too). The handsome 256-page hardback houses some 200 strikingly minimalist illustrations, some clever, some funny and a few that still have us scratching our heads. Is it the 'visual hug' Civaschi claims? Maybe not. But it is an imaginative and fun way of reconnecting with films.  
[www.fouchardfilippi.com](http://www.fouchardfilippi.com)



## Collecting...

# Road trip movies

Viewing *Green Book* on 4K Blu-ray gave **Team HCC** the urge to pack a suitcase and hit the open road. Then we decided to round up 10 other road movie classics on Blu-ray/DVD instead...

## IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT

The first film to win the Academy Awards 'grand slam' (Best Picture, Director, Actor, Actress and Adapted Screenplay), Frank Capra's 1934 sublime screwball comedy stars Claudette Colbert as a spoiled young socialite on the run from her wealthy father, and Cary Grant as a down-on-his-luck reporter who promises to help her if she gives him the exclusive to her story. Cue plenty of quips and chemistry as the pair bicker and banter their way across the US.

**Get it:** *It Happened One Night* joined the Criterion Collection's UK Blu-ray lineup in 2016. In addition to a superb 1080p transfer (based on a new 4K restoration), the disc houses some excellent bonus features, including a feature-length doc about Capra and a video interview with his son.

TOP PICK



## MIDNIGHT RUN

Robert De Niro's bounty hunter shepherds Charles Grodin's mild-mannered accountant from New York to Los Angeles (by train, plane, car, river rapid...) in this 1988 cult classic directed by Martin Brest. A razor-sharp script, delicious action beats and the twin lead performances raise this above the norm.

**Get it:** Second Sight's 2015 Blu-ray saw *Midnight Run* debut with a hit-and-miss image. More recently, Shout Factory has released a Region A Collector's edition based on a new master.



## VACATION

Ed Helms takes on the role of Rusty Griswold in this 2015 sequel to the *National Lampoon's Chevy Chase* movie. Surprisingly, it gets nearly everything right, whether it's bringing Chase back for a cameo, Helms' pitch-perfect portrayal of a well-meaning but ineffective parent, or its torrent of outrageous and imaginative gags – including one standout moment involving a cow and a quad bike...

**Get it:** Warner's Blu-ray release looks clean and crisp and has DTS-HD 5.1 sonics. A *Making of...* is the pick of the extras.



## Y TU MAMÁ TAMBIÉN

With just one US film under his belt (1995's family drama *A Little Princess*), Mexican filmmaker Alfonso Cuarón returned to the country of his birth to shoot this provocative 2001 tale about two sex-obsessed teenagers who hit the road with an older woman escaping from a failed marriage.

**Get it:** Icon's 2010 UK Blu-ray release is now out-of-print and commands a fairly hefty price. The more affordable Region A-locked US Criterion Collection Blu-ray is a superior package.



## EASY RIDER

Dennis Hopper directs himself, co-writer Peter Fonda and Jack Nicholson in this 1969 counter-culture fave that scored big at the box office from a low budget. What starts seemingly as a freewheeling tale of bikers enjoying the Summer of Love becomes something darker altogether...

**Get it:** Sony Pictures' solid 2009 Blu-ray was followed by a 2016 Criterion Collection outing that, while not offering a massive boost in image quality, did add a second chat track and other extras.





## THELMA & LOUISE

Best friends Thelma (Geena Davis) and Louise (Susan Sarandon) find freedom and tragedy in the American New West in this female-led 1991 road movie that scored Best Actress Oscar nominations for both its leads. Ridley Scott proves he's just as adept directing a smallscale drama as ambitious sci-fi, while the movie's finale stays long in the memory.

**Get it:** Fox hasn't revisited the film since a 20th Anniversary Edition BD released in 2011. Now available for under £10, it's loaded with extras including a Scott chat track and in-depth *Making of...*



## WILD AT HEART

David Lynch's wilfully grotesque Palme D'Or-winning 1990 thriller stars Nicolas Cage and Laura Dern as Sailor Ripley and Luna, star-crossed lovers on the run from Luna's demented mother. It's also packed full of allusions to *The Wizard of Oz*, culminating in an appearance by the Good Witch (played by Laura Palmer herself, Sheryl Lee).

**Get it:** A Lynch-supervised 2004 transfer is the basis for all of the Blu-rays to date. Extras, however, are different: the UK platter has none, both the French and US Blu-rays have plenty to enjoy.



## THE BLUES BROTHERS

Dan Ackroyd and John Belushi star as the musicians who hit the road 'on a mission from God' to reunite their band and raise the money needed to save the orphanage they were raised in from foreclosure in this 1980 caper. Throw in top tunes, superb slapstick gags, a cavalcade of guest stars, neo-Nazis and one of the biggest car crashes ever filmed and the result is a musical comedy that has to be seen.

**Get it:** The same Blu-ray has been repackaged numerous times since 2011 – the highlight being a snazzy Zavvi-exclusive Steelbook.



## TWO-LANE BLACKTOP

Monte Hellman's 1971 film provides an almost existential journey along the pre-Interstate highways of America as it follows two drivers racing across the country. However, this is no *Cannonball Run*, instead *Two-Lane Blacktop* is a contemplative and quiet film, and one that still resonates as a minimalist masterpiece. Check it out.

**Get it:** The 2012 Eureka/Masters of Cinema Blu-ray still holds up well and sports quality extras. Alternate commentaries are the only real difference from Criterion's US release.

## LOGAN

It only took three attempts, but 20th Century Fox finally gave Hugh Jackman's Wolverine a solo movie worthy of the character with this ultra-violent 2017 smash based on the popular *Old Man Logan* comic series. Set in the near future, the film sees an ageing Logan going on the run with a dementia-suffering Charles Xavier (Patrick Stewart) and a mysterious young girl (Dafne Keen) with abilities similar to his own.

**Get it:** Sourced from a 4K Digital Intermediate, Fox's Ultra HD Blu-ray release of *Logan* looks every bit as crisp and nuanced as you'd expect, and the platter's exclusive Dolby Atmos mix is no slouch either. It also comes with a second UHD disc housing a 4K presentation of *Logan Noir* – director James Mangold's preferred black-and-white version of the film.



Have we missed one of your favourite road trip movies?  
Let us know: email [letters@homecinemachoice.com](mailto:letters@homecinemachoice.com)



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# SELECT

→ **GEAR GUIDE** **TELEVISIONS** From entry-level 40in LEDs to flagship 4K monsters  
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## HCC RATINGS KEY...

Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★☆
Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★☆☆☆
Dire	★☆☆☆☆

All prices quoted are approximate and may have changed



## TOP 15 Televisions

01


**Samsung QE65Q9FN** → £3,000 ★★★★★

Revised QLED technology and the implementation of a local dimming backlight reap astonishing picture quality rewards with this bright, colourful 4K HDR hero. Great usability and smart platform, too. *HCC #285*

## TOP 5 Blu-ray movies


**Bad Times at the El Royale [UHD Blu-ray]**

Ensemble cast thriller with a Tarantino feel about it. Fox's first HDR10+ encode makes a strong case for the souped-up standard, delivering an impressive upgrade over the HD disc. *HCC #296*

★★★★★


**Widows [UHD Blu-ray]**

Shot on 35mm film for a 4K DI, this well-constructed female-led heist thriller sparkles with detail on Fox's 4K Blu-ray. Atmos audio is more subdued, but gives plenty of room for Hans Zimmer's score to shine. *HCC #297*

★★★★★


**Dr. Seuss' The Grinch 3D**

Well-paced feature-length animation that mostly favours solid gags over mawkish sentimentality. The 3D presentation is excellent, and is joined by a playful Dolby Atmos soundmix. *HCC #297*

★★★★★


**First Man [UHD Blu-ray]**

This Neil Armstrong biopic oozes period detail, while the mix of 16mm, 35mm and IMAX capture results in a varied 4K HDR viewing experience. An excellent Atmos track graces both 4K and 1080p discs. *HCC #296*

★★★★★


**Creed II**

A sequel to both *Creed* and *Rocky IV* (Dolph Lundgren returns!) that adds impressive drama to the expected in-the-ring thrills. The BD's Atmos track is at its best when the punches start flying. *HCC #297*

★★★★★



02



### Philips 65OLED903 → £3,500 ★★★★★

Take impressive audio from a B&W-designed speaker array, OLED-delivered 4K HDR visuals that outshine the competition, and add a sprinkle of Ambilight, and you get the most exciting display Philips has ever released. *HCC #290*

03



### Panasonic TX-65FZ852 → £3,000 ★★★★★

4K HDR OLED (with HDR10+ support) that offers subtlety and refinement in spades (particularly with colour presentation and near-black handling), making up for a slight lack of dynamic punch. Unobtrusive design, too. *HCC #290*

04



### Samsung QE85Q900R

→ £15,000 ★★★★★

It's frighteningly expensive and you won't find any native content to play on it, but Samsung's 85in 8K debutant still wows. Ultra bright and an excellent upscaler of 4K sources. An upgrade to HDMI 2.1 is promised. *HCC #292*

05



### LG OLED65E8

→ £4,300 ★★★★★

This Dolby Vision-enabled OLED boosts image quality on last year's E7 (it's brighter, for one thing), although its Atmos sonics are a tad less impressive. Tidy design and excellent UI. *HCC #287*

06



### Philips 43PUS6753

→ £430 ★★★★★

Sharp, colour-rich, direct-LED images, plus Ambilight and Philips' bespoke SAPHI smart system, make this 43in 4K HDR LCD a smallscreen(ish) dream. Superb option for a second-room/budget setup. *HCC #291*

07



### Sony KD-55AF9

→ £3,000 ★★★★★

Pricier than most 55in OLED rivals, but this Master Series Sony has a unique style, effective 'invisible' audio solution, Dolby Vision/Atmos support and lush 4K visuals. Good new Android OS, too. *HCC #292*

08



### Sony KD-55XF9005

→ £1,700 ★★★★★

Impressive backlighting, dynamic HDR images and top-quality motion processing are the major draws of this mid-tier Bravia. Android OS still needs improvement, though. *HCC #285*

09



### Samsung QE65Q8DN

→ £2,900 ★★★★★

Not as bright as Samsung's top-of-the-range Q9 (and with fewer dimming zones) but still an impactful 4K HDR performer. Excellent HD upscaling, and native motion handling is also solid. *HCC #291*

10



### Hisense H75U9A

→ £3,500 ★★★★★

This 75in LED is the brightest display we've seen, yielding benefits with HDR content, while backlit illumination aids solid black levels. Sharpness and colour delivery are less impressive, but the price/size ratio is good. *HCC #289*

11



### Hisense 55A6200

→ £430 ★★★★★

A great value option, despite brightness levels not doing justice to its HDR support. Visuals are sharp with solid black levels and finessed colour handling. 4K apps and decent audio round out the package. *HCC #295*

12



### Hisense 55U7A

→ £800 ★★★★★

FIFA-branded 4K HDR flatscreen that makes up for a lack of HDR brightness through its image clarity and solid black levels. Strong audio and a clutter-free smart platform sweeten the deal. *HCC #287*

13



### TCL 55DC748

→ £700 ★★★★★

While this budget UHD LCD can look bright, detailed and colour-rich, its whole-frame dimming engine and absence of motion compensation count against it. The JBL soundbar is a little underpowered. *HCC #289*

14



### Sony KD-55XF8505

→ £1,100 ★★★★★

This mid-tier edge-lit Sony set has its strengths, particularly its onboard audio and bright room/bright content playback. But a limited contrast means it never feels overly cinematic. *HCC #287*

15



### Hitachi 75HL16T64U

→ £1,350 ★★★★★

This 75in megascreen offers a lot of 4K image for not a lot of money. Predictably, picture quality can't match that of big-brand rivals – but the TV holds appeal if you're mainly after an SDR display. *HCC #285*



## TOP 15 Speaker systems

01


**Bowers & Wilkins 700 Series 5.1**

→ £3,800 ★★★★★

This array finds the larger models in the 700 Series proving their mettle with formidable power and precision, an expressive mid-band and detailed highs. Excellent. HCC #285

## TOP 5 On-demand


**Bird Box [Netflix]**

Sandra Bullock closes her eyes and hopes for the best in this well-constructed high-concept thriller. *Bird Box* is fast-paced and atmospheric, and has a 5.1/ Atmos soundmix that skilfully heightens the tension. HCC #295

★★★★★


**Outlander: Season Four [Amazon Prime]**

The historical time-travel romp moves its action Stateside for another 13 episodes of steamy romance and deft dramatic plotting, all told with convincing period detail. HCC #294

★★★★★


**Titans [Netflix]**

The juvenile superheroes (including Dick Grayson/Robin) get a gritty makeover in this 11-episode DC Universe series that plays in 1080p. Superb 5.1 soundmixes will have you cranking your AVR. HCC #296

★★★★★


**The Umbrella Academy [Netflix]**

A delicious mix of weirdness and invention, this comic book adaptation is a change of pace from the usual Marvel/DC shenanigans. Excellent 4K HDR presentation. HCC #297

★★★★★


**Mowgli: Legend of the Jungle [Netflix]**

Warner's mo-capped reimagining of Rudyard Kipling's animal-packed fable (directed by Andy Serkis) skips a theatrical window and comes straight to your home cinema. HCC #294

★★★★★





**M&K Sound IW150 5.1** → £8,550 ★★★★★

The in-wall IW150 speakers offer the transparency and detail of a professional studio monitor in an enclosure that can vanish. This array adds driver-matched on-wall tripole surrounds and M&K's fearless X12 sub. The result is outstanding. *HCC #289*



**Wharfedale DX-2** → £450 ★★★★★

The asking price of this 5.1 system will tell you it doesn't offer the last word in surround sound fidelity, but Wharfedale's package is compact, well made and faultlessly delivers on its home-cinema-on-a-budget promise. *HCC #283*



**B&W 600 Series 5.1**

→ £1,850 ★★★★★

Continuum drivers replace Kevlar in B&W's entry-level speaker range, delivering a sound that's precise, transparent and highly entertaining. *HCC #295*



**KEF Q Series 5.1.2**

→ £3,300 ★★★★★

KEF's revamped Q Series now offers Atmos modules for an up-to-the-minute sonic experience. Big, bold-looking speakers. Robust, immersive audio. *HCC #280*



**Q Acoustics 3010i 5.1**

→ £900 ★★★★★

Smaller in stature (and scale) than the 3050i pack, but easier to accommodate. A brilliant performer for the price – balanced, detailed and musical. *HCC #296*



NEW ENTRY

**Fyne Audio F300 5.1**

→ £1,000 ★★★★★

Start-up Scot brand hits the ground running with a floorstanding pack of great value. Plenty of LF heft, detail delivery and soundstage scale. *HCC #297*



**Elipson Prestige Facet 7.2.4**

→ £3,500 ★★★★★

13 cabinets come together to create a great-value and immersive Dolby Atmos array. Rich in fidelity and neutrality; modern styling is another plus point. *HCC #291*



**Q Acoustics 3050i**

→ £1,350 ★★★★★

This update on the previous 3000 series makes subtle performance and styling improvements. The result is an excellent, well-priced, stylish package. *HCC #287*



**Monitor Audio Silver 500 5.1**

→ £3,650 ★★★★★

The new Silver range offers a potent EQ-able sub, sweet design, dipole surrounds and largescale, nuanced sonics. Atmos upfiring models would be nice, though. *HCC #282*



NEW ENTRY

**GoldenEar Triton Two+ 5.2**

→ £6,000 ★★★★★

Floorstanders with in-built active subwoofers provide tight, dynamic bass and simplify installation, while ribbon tweeters ensure a sweet top-end. *HCC #297*



**Wharfedale Diamond 11 HCP**

→ £800 ★★★★★

Bookshelf speakers and 10in sub combine in a system that offers mid-range and treble finesse and a healthy dollop of boisterous bass. Fun and affordable. *HCC #279*



**Klipsch Reference 5.1.2**

→ £2,000 ★★★★★

Not the sleekest-looking speakers but Klipsch's array sounds big, bold and cohesive and is easy to drive. Solid subwoofer, too. *HCC #293*



**Jamo S Series 5.1.2**

→ £1,120 ★★★★★

An affordable package with drop-dead gorgeous styling, neat Atmos module integration and involving sonics – but the 8in sub isn't a beast. *HCC #290*



**Focal Sib Evo Dolby Atmos 5.1.2**

→ £1,200 ★★★★★

Enjoyable-sounding and well-priced sub/sat system with Atmos upfiring in front L/R enclosures. Not the smallest 'satellite' speakers around. *HCC #276*



# TOP 10 Projectors

01


**Sony VPL-VW570ES** → £8,000 ★★★★★

This native 4K projector offers a top-flight UHD performance, and adds a dynamic iris and boosted luminance over the step-down 270ES. Still not the brightest model around, but in a dedicated cinema it shines. *HCC #295*

02


**Optoma UHD51** → £1,500 ★★★★★

Optoma's mid-priced 4K DLP model adds 3D playback (at 1080p) to its home cinema repertoire, making it an obvious upgrade for stereoscopy fans. Sharp, colour-rich and dynamic visuals. *HCC #287*

03


**SIM2 Nero 4S**

→ £30,000 ★★★★★

High-price PJ for high-end largescreen installs. Class-leading brightness and sharpness results in exemplary 4K HDR projection. Precise setup controls and wide-ranging calibration tools. *HCC #296*

04


**Sony VPL-VW270ES**

→ £5,000 ★★★★★

Sony has refined the performance of its entry-level 4K PJ, improving contrast and HDR delivery, ensuring cinematic thrills. Bonus features include motorised controls and 3D playback. *HCC #293*

05


**Epson EH-TW7400**

→ £2,200 ★★★★★

HLG playback is missing from the spec sheet but otherwise this 4K upscaling LCD PJ hits all the right notes. Setup tools include lens memory presets; images are bright, colourful and contrast-rich. *HCC #293*

06


**BenQ TK800**

→ £1,200 ★★★★★

A lot of enjoyable performance crammed into a compact package. Offers 4K HDR playback, plus 3D, with only a limited black level and occasionally pushed colours counting against. *HCC #288*

07



NEW ENTRY

**Sony VPL-VW870ES**

→ £25,000 ★★★★★

Native 4K beamer with laser light source aimed at largescreen theatres. Superb images from both SDR and HDR sources (plus 3D support), but there are strong rivals both above and below the price. *HCC #297*

08


**Vivitek HK2288**

→ £2,500 ★★★★★

The Taiwanese brand returns to the UK with a 4K DLP PJ that balances impressive HDR brightness with stable images. Excellent remote control and decent zoom and throw options. *HCC #285*

09


**Optoma UHZ65**

→ £5,000 ★★★★★

The asking price here reflects Optoma's addition of laser illumination (yielding improved contrast and far greater 'lamp' life) to the DLP 4K and HDR playback talents of its stablemates. *HCC #282*

10


**Acer VL7860**

→ £3,500 ★★★★★

Laser 4K DLP projector that misses out on the contrast performance of some models, but undercuts them in terms of pricing. Use the Silent mode for whisper-quiet operation. *HCC #284*

## Awar winnin home cinemas

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# TOP 10 Blu-ray players

01



**Pioneer UDP-LX800** → £2,200 ★★★★★

A phenomenal universal disc spinner, which adds audiophile-grade music playback to its 4K BD talents. Includes Dolby Vision support, with HDR10+ promised via future firmware. Build quality is staggering. *HCC #293*

02



**Panasonic DP-UB9000** → £850 ★★★★★

Supporting both HDR10+ and Dolby Vision, and incorporating useful image adjustments, this premium player is at the leading edge of UHD BD playback. The astonishing construction and provision of VOD apps heighten its appeal. *HCC #292*

03



**Pioneer UDP-LX500**

→ £1,000 ★★★★★

Lacks the audiophile features (including XLR output) of the UDP-LX800 but still sounds sublime with CD and hi-res audio. Dolby Vision playback, with HDR10+ due via firmware. No VOD apps. *HCC #296*

04



**Sony UBP-X700**

→ £250 ★★★★★

A compact player updated to Dolby Vision support, the UBP-X700 has a nondescript design, no analogue outs and a stubby remote. But it plays great, and offers SACD support. *HCC #284*

05



**Panasonic DP-UB420**

→ £250 ★★★★★

Hi-res file support and HDR10+ compatibility make up for this deck's lightweight build and basic streaming app provision. Plenty of user tweaks on offer and a tempting price. *HCC #291*

06



**Panasonic DP-UB820**

→ £400 ★★★★★

Panasonic's mid-ranger delivers on both the HDR10+ and DV fronts, and introduces multichannel analogue outputs. As with the UB420, the VOD portal could do with a style makeover. *HCC #295*

07



**Sony UBP-X800**

→ £270 ★★★★★

Sony embraces UHD Blu-ray with a full-width, sturdy design that'll also spin DVD-A and SACD platters. A great all-rounder, but no current Dolby Vision support or word on an update. *HCC #274*

08



**Cambridge Audio CXUHD**

→ £800 ★★★★★

The lack of analogue outputs is a surprise considering CA's heritage, but this universal (and DV-capable) deck sounds sweet over its digital outs. As with Oppo's UDP-203, a MediaTek SoC is used. *HCC #279*

09



**Panasonic DMP-UB300**

→ £130 ★★★★★

Great 4K imagery from this bargain 2017-era deck, but you might prefer to up your budget – no split HDMI, optical/coaxial or Wi-Fi connections here. Half-size design for an easy install. *HCC #272*

10



**Samsung UBD-M9500**

→ £230 ★★★★★

Second-gen 4K player that adds features (mobile BD streaming, 360-degree image support) but removes 3D playback capability. As before, the chassis is curved. UHD discs look pin-sharp. *HCC #275*

**Starscape** Fibre Optic Lighting  
CEDIA MEMBER

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Photo courtesy of Gary J. Fernandez Limited



# TOP 10 AV Receivers/AV Processors

01



## Denon AVR-X4500H → £1,500 ★★★★★

Denon's top-tier nine-channel AVR is due an IMAX Enhanced update shortly, topping off an already extensive, user-friendly feature set. Movie playback is dynamic and detailed, and two-channel music sounds sweet too. Superb. *HCC #293*

02



## Arcam AVR850 → £4,500 ★★★★★

High-end seven-channel AVR marrying Class G amplification and Atmos support with talented Dirac Live Room EQ for an excellent performance. Lacks a few feature frills, but 11-channel pre-outs allow full-fat setups. *HCC #257*

03



## Denon AVC-X8500H

→ £3,300 ★★★★★

For those want to go even bigger with their Atmos/DTS:X system, this flagship provides 13 channels of power. Setup can be complex, and there's no FM tuner, but otherwise this is first-class. *HCC #285*

04



## Yamaha CX-A5200

→ £2,600 ★★★★★

11-channel processor with MusicCast integration, XLR hookup and a trio of HDMI outs. Atmos and DTS:X support is bolstered by impressive Surround:AI DSP. Flexible and enjoyable. *HCC #292*

05



## Marantz AV8805

→ £3,600 ★★★★★

The most affordable 13-channel processor around, the AV8805 combines lean looks, setup flexibility and a musical, detailed sound performance. Uses Audyssey MultEQ XT32 calibration. *HCC #288*

06



## Marantz NR1609

→ £650 ★★★★★

AirPlay 2 and a phono stage input for vinyl junkies are among the new specs of Marantz's 7-channel slimline model. An assured performer with film and music; great usability and styling. *HCC #295*

07



## NAD Masters Series M17 V2

→ £5,500 ★★★★★

Dirac Live replaces Audyssey EQ in this revamped high-end processor; 4K HDR passthrough, Atmos and DTS:X decoding, and BluOS music streaming also join the party. *HCC #293*

08



## Sony STR-DN1080

→ £550 ★★★★★

Sony is back in the AVR game with a first Atmos model that adds worthy phantom rear speaker processing to its 5.1.2 sonics. A few UI niggles don't take much of the shine off an impressive budget buy. *HCC #277*

09



## Pioneer VSX-933

→ £470 ★★★★★

An affordable seven-channel AVR where copious music streaming options are joined by a punchy, upbeat home cinema performance. Improved remote and menus, but only one HDMI output. *HCC #292*

10



## IOTAVX AVXP1

→ £1,050 ★★★★★

Brit brand power amplifier with plenty of Class AB grunt (rated at 7 x 110W into 8 ohms) and a rugged build quality – one to audition if your cinema setup is in need of more channels. *HCC #293*

# TOP 5 Bonus features



## Behind the Fallout

This seven-part documentary looking at the making of *Mission Impossible: Fallout*'s astonishing stunts (including one cut from the final film) is a great accompaniment to Tom Cruise's latest blockbuster. *HCC #293*

★★★★★



## Maelstrom: The Odyssey of Waterworld

Get superb insight into the fraught production of Kevin Costner's post-apocalyptic epic with this new feature-length *Making of...* documentary on Arrow's BD release. *HCC #295*

★★★★★



## The Horrors of War

Accompanying the BD of WWII action-horror *Overlord* is this 50-minute documentary – split into six sections – which digs into nice detail around the film's production, themes and key sequences. *HCC #296*

★★★★★



## Widows Unmasked: A Chicago Story

How does a 1980s ITV drama become a 2019 Hollywood film directed by Oscar-winner Steve McQueen? This detailed 50-minute *Making of...* doc has the answers. *HCC #297*

★★★★★



## Learned Behavior: Special Features at Work

Fascinating 60-min roundtable chat that crops up on the *Kin* Blu-ray, covering the concept of extra features themselves. *Kin*'s co-directors are joined by Kevin Smith and others. *HCC #296*

★★★★★



# TOP 10 Subwoofers



**REL No.25** → £6,500 ★★★★★  
REL celebrates its 25th anniversary in style with this 15in/1,000W premium concoction that exhibits exhilarating speed and nuance down to serious depths. Big, but beautiful. HCC #271



**Bowers & Wilkins DB1D**  
→ £3,750 ★★★★★  
This sequel to the DB1 moves EQ to an app and changes driver/amp design. Beautifully controlled performance with depth and detail. Gorgeous bodywork. HCC #277



**SVS SB16-Ultra**  
→ £2,500 ★★★★★  
A 16in driver and 1,500W amp combine to give SVS's flagship sealed sub real appeal. Goes low but remains tight and fast. App-assisted EQ and operation. HCC #270



**Fyne Audio F3-12**  
→ £600 ★★★★★  
12in driver in a ported enclosure at a great price. Basic setup and styling, but it maintains control and nuance while dropping deep. HCC #297



**REL HT/1508 Predator**  
→ £1,600 ★★★★★  
The flagship of REL's Serie HT lineup uses a 15in woofer and claimed 800W power plant to hammer home its home-cinema-centric ethos. Enormous fun. HCC #296



**REL HT/1205**  
→ £700 ★★★★★  
A larger (12in) driver and punchier amp than on the HT/1003 increases LFE enjoyment – but still at a bargain price. Lacks a bit of subtlety though. HCC #290



**Eclipse TD725SWMK2**  
→ £5,000 ★★★★★  
Eclipse aims for speed and accuracy with this flagship. Dual opposed 10in woofers perform as advertised – bass is astonishingly precise and percussive. HCC #297



**REL HT/1003**  
→ £500 ★★★★★  
REL targets film fans with a 10in sub that drops its usual simultaneous high/low-level input to hit a new price point. Power and speed are its strengths. HCC #286



**SVS SB-4000**  
→ £1,800 ★★★★★  
Similar in operation and styling to the SB16-Ultra flagship, but smaller and more affordable. Superior DSP results in a real sense of control. HCC #284



**GoldenEar SuperSub X**  
→ £1,450 ★★★★★  
Four drivers squeezed into a relatively compact design and given plenty of push from a 1,400W amp. Standout traits are impact and depth. HCC #272

# TOP 5 Console games



**Red Dead Redemption II**  
Rockstar Games' years-in-the-making Wild West action/puzzler prequel offers a mammoth open-world gaming experience with excellent attention to detail. Fantastic five-star fun, despite muted visuals. HCC #293  
★★★★★



**Resident Evil 2**  
Capcom remakes the legendary horror survival game for current-gen PS and Xbox consoles, retaining the original's charms but tweaking gameplay and delivering a first-rate AV experience. HCC #296  
★★★★★



**Marvel's Spider-Man**  
Swing around New York City in this joyous, bright and colourful superhero tie-in. Graphically rich, with intuitive gameplay and fast, free-flowing combat. A suitably epic score completes an excellent all-round package. HCC #291  
★★★★★



**Super Smash Bros. Ultimate**  
Boasting a host of characters (including some retro surprises), eight-player multiplayer, smooth 60fps visuals and frantic action, this Nintendo Switch beat-'em up is a hoot. HCC #295  
★★★★★



**Shadow of the Tomb Raider**  
Lara's back and she means business in this lengthy, stealth-tastic puzzle adventure from Square Enix. The best Tomb Raider title yet, and gorgeous to look at. HCC #292  
★★★★★



## TOP 10 Accessories

01



### Amazon Fire TV Stick 4K → £50 ★★★★★

This upgraded streaming dongle brings 4K HDR (HDR10+; Dolby Vision) and Dolby Atmos to your movie den. Voice control improves search, while a new quad-core processor yields quick load times and stream optimisation. A little stunner. *HCC #295*

02



### Bluesound Node 2i → £500 ★★★★★

Hi-res preamp/DAC to hook up to a stereo amp/AVR/active speakers. Integrates with the BluOS app for a wide range of streaming services and home media playback. Compact and an excellent performer. *HCC #296*

03



### Amazon Echo Input

→ £35 ★★★★★

No speaker here – just a disc-shaped Alexa device that links to your receiver via 3.5mm – or Bluetooth – and packs four far-field microphones to detect your voice commands.

*HCC #296*

04



### Yamaha WX-AD10

→ £150 ★★★★★

Simple to use, unobtrusive add-on that brings MusicCast multiroom/hi-res streaming to legacy AV gear via 3.5mm/phono connections. Not a bad price – only available in grey, unfortunately.

*HCC #274*

05



### Roku Streaming Stick+

→ £70 ★★★★★

If a simple life is your aim, this content-rich, 4K/HDR-capable stick from the streaming specialist is your friend. Idiot-proof interface and control. Good price.

*HCC #282*

06



### Edifier S350DB

→ £250 ★★★★★

Active 2.1 speaker system that's a fine alternative to a soundbar, with good bass integration and effects separation. No HDMI hookup and retro styling, but easy to setup and use.

*HCC #291*

07



### Apple TV 4K

→ £180 (32GB) ★★★★★

With Apple's iTunes movie store offering 4K HDR (Dolby Vision) movies at the same price as Full HD downloads, this compact media player (irritating handset aside) is sure to tempt.

*HCC #284*

08



### Synology DS119j

→ £95 ★★★★★

Entry-level single-bay NAS (you'll need to add your own HDD) that benefits from Synology's impressive DSM operating system. Quick to get up and running, versatile and smart-looking. *HCC #292*

09



### Systemline S7 Netlink Music Player

→ £700 ★★★★★

Stereo streamer with integrated services including BBC Radio at better-than-usual quality. Installation flexibility makes up for the prosaic design. *HCC #290*

10



### Amazon Echo Sub

→ £120 ★★★★★

This nicely styled bass bin to supplement Amazon's Echo speakers adds notable punch to streamed music and makes a 2.1 Dot system good value. Lacks subtlety and is overbearing with speech radio, though. *HCC #293*

## TOP 5 Blu-ray/DVD boxsets



### William Castle at Columbia: Volume One

Four gimmick-filled spine-tinglers (including 1960's part-anaglyph 3D *13 Ghosts*) are joined by a typically brilliant selection of extras in Indicator's deluxe package. *HCC #294*

★★★★★



### The Ring Collection

*Ring*, *Ring 2* and *Ring 0* – plus the oft-forgotten other sequel *Rasen* (aka *Spiral*) – get a Blu-ray boxset that will appeal to J-Horror fans. *Ring*'s new restoration is streets ahead of previous discs. *HCC #297*

★★★★★



### Dr Who: The Collection – Season 19

The BBC's BD outing for Peter Davison's debut Time Lord season benefits from the show's move (in parts) from video to 16mm film capture. A TARDIS full of extras, too. *HCC #295*

★★★★★



### Batman: The Complete Animated Series

All 109 episodes of Fox's groundbreaking 'toon have been meticulously restored for this BD boxset. Among the copious extras is a new 98-minute *Making of...* doc. *HCC #293*

★★★★★



### Once Upon a Time in China Trilogy

Jet Li stars (as folk hero Wong Fei-Hung) in this trio of 1990s martial arts flicks, bundled here with fourth movie *...in America and China*. Extras include a trio of commentary tracks. *HCC #295*

★★★★★



## TOP 10 Soundbars & Soundbases



**01 Samsung HW-N950** → £1,500 ★★★★★  
The latest and greatest soundbar system to arrive from Samsung's US-based Audio Lab, the HDMI-equipped N950 crafts a dynamic, detailed and immersive 7.1.4 Atmos/DTS:X soundfield without cluttering your room. *HCC #290*



**02 Canton DM55** → £320 ★★★★★  
Canton's smallest soundbase still delivers big sonic thrills. Twin woofers underpin clean and crisp mids and highs, and build quality is first-rate. Doddle to use. Bluetooth built-in. *HCC #260*



**03 Yamaha YSP-5600SW** → £1,900 ★★★★★  
With its 46 drivers (including upfiring) this premium 'bar delivers precisely steered and immersive audio, even of the Atmos variety. Potent wireless sub and 4K-capable HDMI switching sweeten the high-end deal. *HCC #254*



**04 Denon HEOS Bar** → £570 ★★★★★  
Multiroom-ready and app-controllable, this premium single-enclosure model offers powerful, detailed and warm sonics in spades. Can be expanded into a 5.1 system with extra HEOS hardware. *HCC #287*



**05 Q Acoustics M3** → £300 ★★★★★  
A 4in x 6in woofer is tucked away in the M3's eye-catching angular chassis, ensuring this well-priced soundbar has a full-range performance. Simple to use. Bluetooth streaming. *HCC #271*



**06 JBL Bar Studio** → £150 ★★★★★  
No subwoofer here, just a fairly compact stereo 'bar that offers a useful soundstage-widening 'Surround' mode, HDMI ARC connectivity, and a decent performance for the price. *HCC #284*



**07 Harman Kardon Enchant 1300** → £900 ★★★★★  
No Atmos/DTS:X and adding a sub will set you back £620, but this big-ticket soundbar impresses with its detailed, refined and musical one-box performance. Strong connectivity includes HDMI and Chromecast. *HCC #296*



**08 Sony HT-ZF9** → £650 ★★★★★  
This 3.1-channel soundbar handles Dolby Atmos streams and promises enveloping sonics via DSP trickery. The result isn't noticeable overhead audio, but a wide, high and exciting performance. *HCC #289*



**09 Q Acoustics M2** → £300 ★★★★★  
Easily accommodated in/on AV furniture, and packing HDMI ARC for a simple hookup, this BMR-driver/built-in woofer soundbase impresses with its energetic delivery and price. *HCC #279*



**10 Wharfedale Vista 200S** → £150 ★★★★★  
HDMI ARC makes this budget soundbar/sub easy to install, and its audio presentation delivers good stereo imaging and rich bass. Better with movies than music, and not the grandest of soundstages. *HCC #295*

## TOP 5 Back-catalogue Blu-rays



**Waterworld: Limited Edition**  
Kevin Costner's waterlogged post-apocalyptic epic never quite lives up to its promise, but Arrow's BD release pleases fans by packing three different cuts of the movie. *HCC #295*  
★★★★★



**Laura**  
1944 film noir gem starring Gene Tierney and Dana Andrews, dug up by Eureka for Masters of Cinema BD treatment. Black-and-white photography looks exquisite, and extras include an alternate cut. *HCC #295*  
★★★★★



**World on a Wire: Limited Ed.**  
Second Sight brings this mind-messing two-part 1973 sci-fi mini series to BD, with an encode that handles the 16mm photography well, and more extras than the US Criterion Collection version. *HCC #296*  
★★★★★



**Schindler's List: 25th Anniversary Edition [UHD Blu-ray]**  
Spielberg's monochrome classic gets more out of its director-approved HDR grade than you might expect – and the film remains unmissable. *HCC #296*  
★★★★★



**Detour**  
An extensive 4K restoration (detailed in one of the disc's extras) yields a gob-smackingly gorgeous 1080p image on this Criterion Collection release. The movie itself is a low-budget 1945 film noir classic. *HCC #297*  
★★★★★



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## TOP 5 PVRs



### Virgin Media TiVo, £subscription

This triple-tuner PVR offers recording flexibility, useful features – you can undelete deleted shows! – and smart TiVo functionality. If you're in a cable area, consider it

★★★★★



### Sky Q, £subscription

Sky's new top-tier product offering dazzles with its image-rich user interface, wireless multiroom skills and recording flexibility delivered by the PVR's 12 tuners. Now supports 4K content

★★★★★



### Humax FVP-5000T

Revamped menus, faster operation and tweaks to its triple-tuner engine make this the most advanced Freeview Play PVR around – and it doubles admirably as a DLNA player/media jukebox. 500GB/1TB/2TB

★★★★★



### Humax DTR-T4000, £subscription

This YouView-based PVR is required to get BT Sport's new Ultra HD channel – available to those with BT fast fibre and a BT TV sub. Easy to use and with 1TB of storage

★★★★★



### Manhattan T2-R, £120

The 500GB HDD and twin-tuner spec of this Freeview HD PVR is basic, but Manhattan's new hardware design, user interface (and the price tag) are appealing. Easy to use.

★★★★★

## TOP 5 Headphones



### JBL Tune600BTNC, £85

A commendable budget option from JBL, with closed-back, comfortable ear-cups, reasonably effective noise-cancelling, Bluetooth hookup, and a presentation with a good sense of scale and impact

★★★★★



### Nuraphones, £350

Unusual over-ear/in-ear hybrid cans that measure the acoustic response of your inner ear to fine-tune performance. It's a highly impressive trick, but the design can make these a bit uncomfortable to wear

★★★★★



### 1More MK802, £150

Ignore the bling-tastic blue or red finishes and focus on the assured sound performance from these well-priced closed-back cans. Features include wireless Bluetooth and app control (with burn-in mode). Great value

★★★★★



### Bowers & Wilkins PX, £330

B&W adds noise-cancelling to the general spec of its previous P7 wireless cans, a welcome update for those seeking uninterrupted listening. Offers a neutral, balanced sound suited to both movies and music

★★★★★



### Sony WH-1000XM3, £330

Third-gen noise-cancelling wired/wireless 'phones are deliciously comfortable and deliver an intimate performance with strong spatial imaging and nuanced bass. Compatible with LDAC source gear

★★★★★

## TOP 5 Wireless speakers



### DALI Katch, £330

Portable Bluetooth speaker (aptX-capable) with stereo driver array and gorgeous design. Excellent blend of low-end punch and mid-range/treble detail. Rechargeable battery life is rated at 24 hours.

★★★★★



### Bluesound Pulse Mini 2i, £500

Hi-res-capable wireless speaker that proves equally impressive when used as a TV soundbar alternative. A largescale stereo sound with mid-range muscle and HF sparkle.

★★★★★



### Dynaudio Music 7, £875

Top-of-the-range multiroom option from Dynaudio, this sizable speaker creates a full-range, detailed soundstage. Music App offers useful adjustments and EQ modes. Inputs include HDMI (ARC)

★★★★★



### Airpulse Audio A200, £800

Monitor-style active speakers offering physical and wireless hookups, a premium build and a sweet yet weighty sound delivered by ribbon tweeters and 5.5in midbass drivers

★★★★★



### Libratone Zipp 2, £280

Well-priced do-it-all portable speaker adds voice interaction, Wi-Fi streaming, Spotify Connect, 3.5mm hookup and auto Room EQ to its Bluetooth spec. Solid sound quality, albeit monophonic.

★★★★★

# HOME CINEMA

Choice

## → IN THE NEXT ISSUE

**Projector lowdown** Everything you need to know about bigscreen home cinema  
**This is Ripley, signing off** *Alien* 4K Blu-ray  
**Bang & Olufsen** Designer TV brand refreshes its TV lineup

## → REVIEWS

**Focal Aria 5.1 system** **Bryston SP4 processor**  
**Yamaha RX-A1080 AV receiver** **Bowers & Wilkins DB3D subwoofer** **Elipson Infinite on-wall speakers**  
**PLUS** News, software, opinion, comps and more

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CONTENTS SUBJECT TO CHANGE – BUT ONLY FOR THE BETTER





# AV Avenger

Marketeers want to sell you an 8K future, but **Steve May** isn't buying yet – and it's not just down to a lack of content

**THE MORE** I think about it, the more 8K doesn't add up.

4K is a big step forward from Full HD, not just because UHD TVs have four times the pixel density of 1080p models, but because it's parcelled with tangible benefits like wide colour gamut and HDR.

As a card-carrying early adopter, I'm not normally one to join the naysayers. But I'm not convinced leaping from 2,160p to 4,320p will bring comparable improvements.

The most oft-quoted reason not to get overly excited is content, or rather the lack of it. 8K comes with huge overheads in terms of investment and infrastructure for broadcasters. Only Japanese state outfit NHK has anything that resembles a road map, and that's because it committed early on to making Tokyo 2020 a political platform for Japanese 8K technologies.

Streaming service Rakuten TV, stepping up its rhetoric against rivals Netflix and Amazon Prime Video, has teased an 8K streaming service before the end of the year. The company currently offers 4K VOD to select sets (Dolby Vision with Atmos if you have an LG screen). Details are sparse, but I'll wager any roll-out will almost certainly be part of a partnership with a bank-rolling TV manufacturer.

We know studios have been experimenting with 8K movie transfers, but discernible dividends could be less obvious than you might imagine – and the results may not even be desirable.

Let's assume a proto 8K streaming service comprises pristine transfers of 65-70mm film. Let's also assume that these transfers capture genuine picture information and not just film grain. While that fine detail may be evident in a still frame, when compared to 4K, as soon as it rolls at 24fps, motion blur is likely to obscure the extra definition.

The only way to resolve (literally) this is to view at higher frame rates. The latest 8K screens have this covered, and will support frame rates up to 120fps. But (to pluck a title out of thin air), would you want to see David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* in 8K at 120fps? Ugh.

The soap opera effect is rightfully anathema to film fans. Even the dogged persistence of Ang Lee and Peter Jackson hasn't changed the fact that high-frame-rate movies look ghastly. **No one in their right mind would opt to watch a classic in HFR** just to glimpse Lilliputian improvements in definition.

The obvious real world beneficiary for high-frame-rate 8K is sport, but that brings us back to the Tokyo Olympics, NHK and said broadcasting technology impasse.

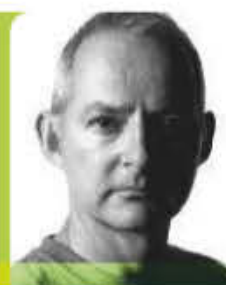
But there's an even bigger hurdle. I don't believe for one moment people will either sit close enough to their 8K screen, or be able to afford one that's big enough (80in plus) to view from a socially acceptable distance, to see the difference and warrant the investment.

Which isn't to say I don't think 8K is important. For live events it's incredible useful, as it allows programme makers to crop into images for replays and the like, to show close-ups without sacrificing detail. It's also an excellent archiving solution for studios eager to protect their film inventory. Expect to hear a lot more stories about movies being re-scanned at 8K.

Not that any of this will stop the hype train. As Tokyo 2020 nears, you can be certain the AV industry will make an Olympian effort to convince us that having 33 million pixels counts ■

*Are you planning an 8K TV purchase?  
Let us know: email [letters@homecinemachoice.com](mailto:letters@homecinemachoice.com)*

**Steve May** would be excited by the prospect of football in 8K/120, but first he needs to learn the offside rule. And all the other rules too





# COMING SOON



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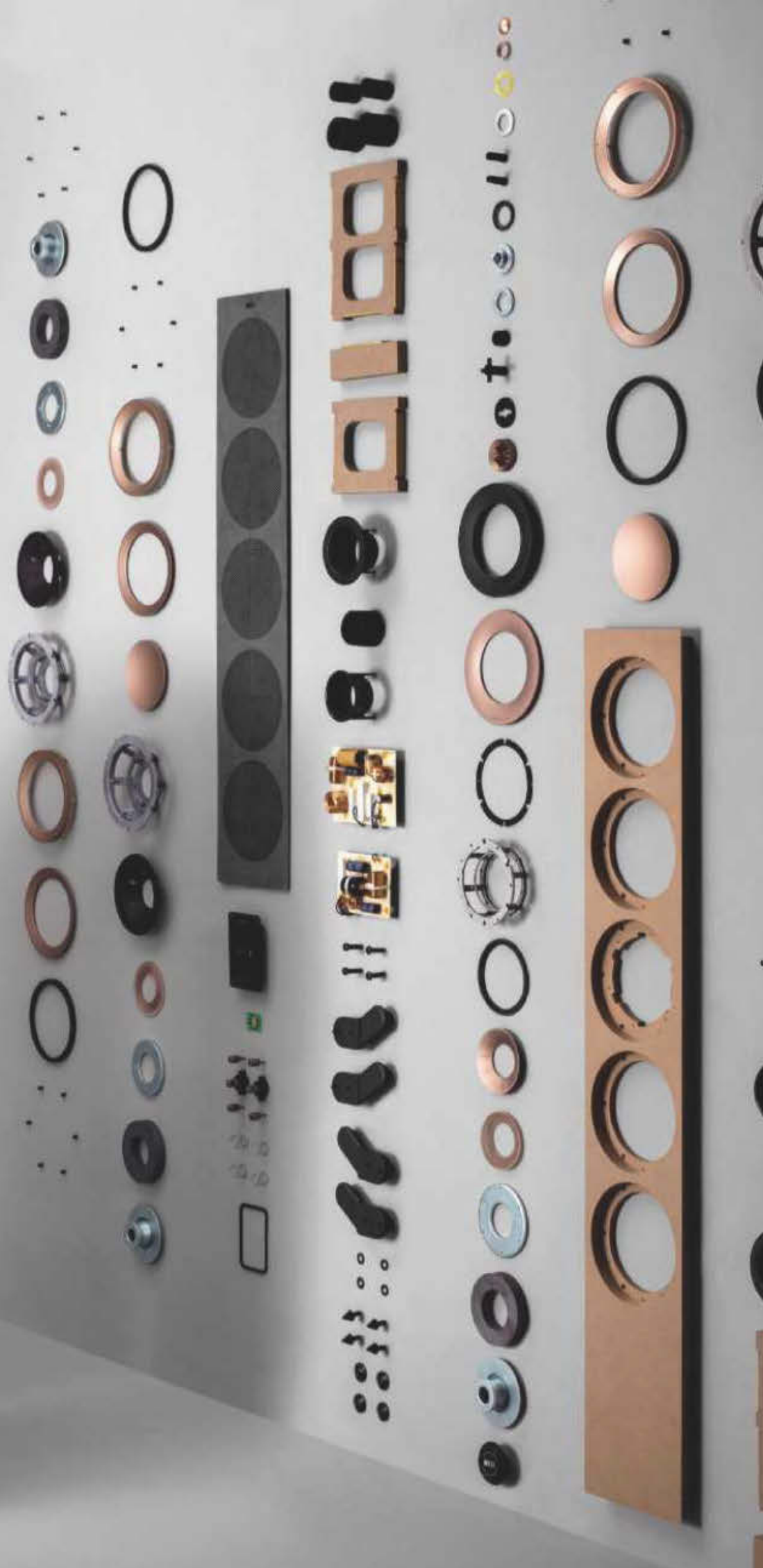
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